

ADVENTURES OF
ROBIN HOOD





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THE
LIFE AND ADVENTURES
OF
ROBIN HOOD

BY
JOHN B. MARSH



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THE
LIFE AND ADVENTURES
ROBIN HOD

Uniform with this Volume.

THE ARABIAN NIGHTS.

DON QUIXOTE FOR BOYS.

ROBINSON CRUSOE.

CAPTAIN COOK'S VOYAGES.

ANDERSEN'S FAIRY TALES.

THE SWISS FAMILY ROBINSON.



PREFACE.

THIS story is designed for the amusement of young persons. The incidents are drawn chiefly from the Robin Hood ballads; but many of the writer's own invention have been introduced. When the book was undertaken, the author was aware that no story of the life of the rover of Sherwood had been written specially for the class of readers alluded to, and he hopes that he may not have altogether failed in supplying satisfactorily the want which he supposed to exist.

In the ballads, Robin Hood is represented as brave, courteous, generous, and religious; withal he was a robber. It was, however, the age that made the man. Kings and prelates in those days filled their coffers by acts as grossly wrong as those by which Robin

replenished the stores of himself and band. Robin was in all likelihood driven to the course of life he adopted, more by the tyranny and wrong-doing of those in authority, than by a natural love of the life which he led. He strove against the oppression from which he and others suffered, and, in doing so, was forced to a certain extent to use oppression; but it was those only who were guilty of the oppression whom he punished.

The incidents have been threaded together by a slender plot; and no attempt has been made to develop the characters of the principal actors.

The author's thanks are due to Mr Gee, for the loan of many rare books, and to Mr J. H. Welch, for assistance rendered in the course of revising for the press.





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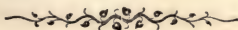
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ROBIN HOOD.

CHAPTER I.

Gamewell Hall, and the Gamewells—The feast, and the friends who met—Ivy Harper's song—The attack from the foresters—The fight—Death of Ivy Harper.

GAMEWELL HOUSE was a two-storied building of timber, which stood within the boundary of Sherwood Forest. For several generations it had been the residence of the Gamewells, the descendants of a noble Saxon family, who at one time possessed several hundreds of acres of forest and pasture-lands, farmed by dependents, who paid rent in the shape of cattle and food, and, when the Great House, as Gamewell was called, was threatened by any hostile forces, were expected to assist in repelling the assailants.

The conquest of England by William resulted in a free distribution of the territorial possessions of many of the Saxon nobility amongst his own leaders, and one of these stripped the old Saxon nobleman of the major portion of his land and dependents; but the house itself escaped the general confiscation, simply because it was deemed unworthy of being the residence of a Norman baron. Retaining therewith only a few acres in the neighbourhood, the Gamewells from that time subsisted on the fruit of the soil, and what game the forest afforded them.

The Norman had built a castle about eight miles from Gamewell, and found enough trouble in managing his ill-gotten land and villains, without subjecting the poor Saxon he had robbed to further molestation and injustice. With a magnanimity equally characteristic, he compounded with the Saxon lord for allowing him to retain his mansion and a few acres, on the condition of the annual payment of a few hogs, to be delivered at appointed seasons of the year, and a specified number of hides and rushes for domestic use, besides a certain quantity of provender for cattle. From the position of a landowner of considerable extent, the Saxon was thus reduced to a state of vassalage, exceedingly galling to his pride. Opportunities, however, were constantly occurring for petty displays of his independence through the temporary absence of the baron on some predatory expedition on the king's account, when Gamewell invariably refused to send in his contribution of hogs and provender; and as the barons, fortunately for

him, were constantly getting killed, he lived to see several successive proprietors of his lands.

The antipathy he exhibited towards his Norman conquerors was inherited by his descendants, until it became the occupation of the Norman landowner, when not engaged in the king's service, to punish the Gamewell family, stealing their cattle, burning their house, and driving them into the forest, where they found plenty of game to eat and pure water to drink, so long as the baron remained; but they invariably returned when he was absent, and rebuilt their house.

In 1173, the male representative of the Saxon nobleman was Roger Gamewell, whose wife had died under the hardships of a severe winter in the forest, leaving an only child behind her called Will.

This Gamewell, by a politic present of smoked bacon, in addition to the usual contribution of hogs, had so far ingratiated himself with Baron Holdhard that he obtained permission to add to his estate a whole acre of ground belonging to his neighbour, a churlish vassal, whom the baron desired to punish. Roger took advantage of this gracious condescension not only to seize the land, but also to repair and fortify his own residence.

The house occupied one side of a square piece of ground, round which a deep broad trench had been dug and filled with water, the earth being thrown up on the inner side, so as to form a rampart round the whole. The building was built of oak-staves roughly hewn into the required shape by an axe. Huge

stakes of wood were driven into the ground, and a room about forty feet long, by ten feet wide and six feet high, thus formed. This served the threefold purpose of great hall, kitchen, and servants' bedroom. The crevices in the wood were freely plastered with clay, and made as comfortable and as handsome as such structures were possible to be made in those days. At one end of the room there were heaps of rushes and dry grass, which formed beds for the people at night; and in the centre was the fireplace—the spot marked by a heap of ashes. Here two forked sticks driven into the ground afforded a rest for the spit and employment for the cook, whose skill was never very great. Pegs driven into the knots in the wood served to hang some drinking horns and a few bows and quivers upon; and, in case of need, for the tethering to of the few cattle which they possessed. The furniture consisted of a long oaken table, and of rudely-fashioned forms and stools.

Above this hall was another room divided into small compartments; entrance to this was effected by a ladder, and through a hole in the floor. The apartment nearest to the ladder was occupied by Roger and his son Will; and other rooms were occupied as they were wanted. Throughout the length of this upper story niches were cut, that the inhabitants might discharge their arrows at those who attacked them. This was the only portion of the house that overlooked the earthen embankment outside. On the inner side of the house slits in the timber admitted some scanty rays of light into the place; and in two

places square-latticed openings, unglazed, were also made for the purpose of getting light.

On the opposite side of the square a flat-roofed shed was constructed, where hides and provender were stored ; and which, in case of an unusual accession of visitors, was used to lodge them. This place was also loopholed on the outer side for the purposes of defence. In former times other sheds had been constructed on the remaining sides, but Roger had neither the means nor the inclination to re-erect them. Tradition ascribed to former Gamewells a very much finer house; but though the apartments may have been larger, and the buildings more numerous, the general outline here given indicates the sort of house in which they resided.

Though Roger had made peace with the Norman, he had managed to incur the displeasure of very powerful enemies, and the chief object he had in rebuilding his house was to defend himself from them. These enemies were the king's foresters. Roger inherited a strong love for chasing and shooting the deer from a long line of ancestors who had enjoyed the privilege of supplying their table from the forest as they chose. Under the regulations introduced by the Conquest, all the deer were claimed by the king, and the punishment for killing one was cutting off the ears. There were many unfortunate Saxons mutilated in this way, on all the lands bordering on the forests. Some of these were in the household of Roger, and as he was known to supply his own wants and those of his retainers, without the

slightest hesitation, from amongst the forest wild stock, he and his family lived in continual fear of assaults from the Norman foresters.

On completing his house, Roger gave a feast, to which he invited several of the Saxon vassals on the lands of the neighbouring barons. This was fixed to take place in the month of September 1178. Amongst the invited guests were Dame Hood (Roger's sister) and her son Robin, Gaffer Hood staying at home; Ivy Harper and his daughter Marian; Deerfoot, Hidehead, and Limpfoot, stout Saxon acquaintances of his, all of whom believed themselves more or less wronged by the Norman landlords on whose estates they lived. The religious element was represented by Friar Goodly of Narrow-flask Abbey, who claimed kindred with some Saxon nobleman whose line, he maintained with imperturbable gravity, ended in his reverend person.

The preparations for the entertainment of these guests were necessarily of an extensive character. Several days were spent in arranging for the proper supply of the table. A fine fat buck was shot and brought in, and the four quarters hung in one of the outbuildings, which was dignified with the name of larder. There also hung hogs, small and large; hares and rabbits; ducks and swans. Several cooking-ranges were extemporised for the occasion in the open air; where, on spits specially adapted to the size of the joint to be cooked, the meat was roasted over wood-fires.

The table in the hall presented a gratifying spec-

tacle to the invited guests on the eventful feast-day. Long rides through the forest gave to all, sharp appetites. A haunch of venison roasted through in parts, and affording every one a cut of the sort specially loved best, whether done or underdone, was carried round the table on the shoulders of two men by means of the spit, and the guests helped themselves to their liking, and each one cut a piece. Slices of coarse brown bread were eaten with meat; and potations of strong ale partaken out of a tankard which was common to all. There were no forks then, so fingers were fashionable. The feasters were very merry, and loud peals of laughter greeted every attempted sally of wit made by Friar Goodly. The friar had brought, in a capacious pocket of his robe, several flasks of good wine from the cellars of the abbey, as a contribution to the feast; and the story of the way he borrowed the keys from the sleeping cellarer's girdle, and helped himself to the best, caused unusual mirth.

The Abbot of Narrowflask was an austere Norman, who found more difficulty in regulating the wine-bibbing propensities of his flock than in collecting the rents of his farms. Wine and good eating were the innocent failings of the friar's nature; redeemed at times with a little philosophy as a set off.

"Now," quoth the friar, after having exhausted the laughter of the evening, "let us have a little philosophical exercise, good for a man's head and helpful to his soul. Wine maketh the heart glad."

"And the head sorry," quoth Robin.

"It filleth a man with rare longings," said the friar.

"And layeth him in the moat," added Robin.

"It giveth sleep and quiet oblivion," continued the friar.

"And the friar borroweth the cellarer's keys," finished Robin, amid uproarious shouts of merriment.

"But there is a greater charmer than wine," said the host, "that the friar knows nothing about," jerking his head in the direction where Marian Harper sat by Robin's side.

Marian was a comely Saxon maiden, a favourite in many households—loved for her kindness of heart, and welcome for her skill in dressing hurts and her knowledge of herbs. This she had inherited from her mother, and from her, too, she derived that outward grace of form, and beauty of face, which made her a *belle* amongst the Saxons. Marian was also skilful with a bow, and could shoot a running deer, or a bird on the wing. The forest had been Marian's nursery and school; and the birds, the beasts, and the flowers had been her monitors. Was it, then, a wonder that she had grown up with an unconquerable love for the wild woods? Her mother died when she was fourteen years of age; and from that time two years had elapsed, and this was the first festive occasion since their loss on which she and her father had ventured to make merry with their friends.

Robin had frequently met Marian in the forest, and when she had killed a deer, had cut out delicate portions, which he had borne for her within hail of her

Saxon home. They had rambled together in the summer-time amongst the trees, and rested beneath the shade of the great oaks, where Robin sang Saxon songs to the music of Marian's harp, and the wild birds gathered together in the branches of the neighbouring trees to listen.

Almost unconsciously there had sprung up between them a strong attachment, which though unconfessed was yet ardent love.

So when Gamewell hinted at the power of woman, Marian blushed at the allusion, and Robin started at the thought, and became aware of his deep love for Marian.

Robin's mother said something about young men loving the wild woods and the bow better than they loved the home of their fathers; and Gamewell, seeing that he had unintentionally put a stop for a time to the merriment of the party, proposed that Ivy Harper should sing for them.

It was now afternoon, and the guests went out into the open part of the square between the buildings, where hides had been laid on the ground for the guests to lie on; and in the centre of a half circle was one raised seat. Towards this seat Gamewell led Marian, who resisted somewhat, but was gently forced, amid approving shouts from those present, into the seat of honour, and was thereby constituted mistress of the sports. The friar brought up the tail-end of the procession of guests, and gravely laid himself down at the feet of Marian.

"What is the prize to be?" asked the friar.

"Five of my best hides," replied Gamewell.

"Nay," quoth Ivy Harper; "the prize shall be my harp."

"With a kiss from Marian," added Gamewell, whereat the friar looked up into her face as though he would have cheapened her lips then; but at a shake of Marian's head he seized his beads and bent his head gravely, as though repeating "Ave Marias!"

Will Gamewell, who had been most attentive to the guests at dinner, here came up with a bundle of quarter-sticks under his arm, which he laid by the friar; but it was resolved that, before indulging in feats of strength, they should have a song from Ivy Harper.

The old minstrel presented a venerable appearance: his hair and beard were white, and though more than sixty winters had tried his strength, he was still as vigorous and active as a young man. He received his harp from the hand of Marian, and after running his fingers over the strings, struck up the air of an old war-song very popular amongst the Saxons. The air was bold and stirring; and the old man's voice accorded well with the notes he drew from his harp. The song related how the Saxons were lords of the island, and owned forests that God had plentifully stocked, wherein they might hunt at their pleasure; then it changed to tell of wars with men who had no respect for old men or maidens, who swept over the country, and took possession of the cities, and by cruel laws drove the inhabitants from the inheritance of their fathers;

and then it described the present state of the land and the people, who though oppressed were still able to revenge themselves upon their conquerors, and shot the deer in the forest and the birds of the air, as their fathers had done for centuries before them. Here the song changed to tell of losses, of friends that were gone, of loved ones that slept the long sleep, from which they would never wake again; and at this point the old harper's voice quivered, and his hand trembled.

At the same moment the sharp buzz of an arrow was heard, and the feathered messenger struck the harp from old Ivy's hand. All the guests started to their feet and sought shelter in the hall where they had dined. Roger Gamewell, his son, and Robin clambered into the loft above the hall, and were quick enough to see seven or eight men glide behind some trees a hundred yards off. Three only were left in the open glade beyond the wood. Roger opened a casement and shouted to know the reason of their shooting into the midst of a peaceful assembly. At the first glance Roger saw they were foresters, and guessed their business was to look after the remains of the buck on which the guests had been feasting. The men wore short jackets of untrimmed hide, with a belt across the waist, and a slouched round hat with a single feather stuck in the brim. They had each a bow and quiver full of arrows. The leader, a tall, bony man, carried a horn in his hand, and in reply shouted that they were the king's foresters, and wanted food and rest; that they had been waiting

outside long enough, and could not attract attention, though they had been shouting for some time. Roger refused admittance, telling them he had no room for such lordly guests. At this one of the foresters, at a sign from his leader, drew an arrow from his quiver and fitted it to his bow. Robin, who had been watching what was going on through one of the slits in the wall, was too quick for the forester, and before the man had thrown himself into position to shoot, an arrow from Robin pinned his hand to his bow. The forester gave a yell of agony, and fled to the nearest tree for refuge. Roger closed the casement and secured it on the inside. Meanwhile the women in the hall had not been idle; bows and arrows enough to supply the whole party were quickly found. Robin and Will were left in the loft to watch the foresters, while Roger, Hidehead, Deerfoot, and the others crossed to the out-offices on the opposite side to reconnoitre. Those parts of the ground not occupied by buildings had been very strongly staked, and this having been recently executed could be relied upon. Between these staked walls and the embankment was a walk of about three feet in width, so that, even if the enemy did get across the moat and over the embankment, they would scarcely succeed in getting further. Facing the spot where, by a simple contrivance of planks, the moat was crossed, Roger posted Limpfoot, with instructions to give timely warning, by blowing a note on his horn, when he saw any of the enemy and wanted assistance. A rude gate had been constructed to close the gap in the

embankment which had been left for a passage into the grounds of the hall. The planking from the moat had been cautiously drawn within the enclosure in the early part of the day, and the gate securely fastened. Roger, however, resolved to make it still stronger by rolling against it some logs of wood ; and after posting others of his guests in different directions, where they might command every part of his house and outbuildings, he returned, with two of his men, to finish the barricading of the gate. In the enclosure between the embankment were a number of roughly-hewn trunks of trees, which they found very little difficulty in rolling against the bottom of the gate, and thus rendered it so secure that the united efforts of six or seven men would not move it. Roger had little fear of the result of the contest, because he found, on numbering his force, that he had twenty-three men, besides five women and the friar. While the disposition of his force was being made, the three foresters without had been joined by their comrades, whom Roger and the others had been sharp enough to see glide behind the trees before they opened the casement. The enemy now numbered ten men, the wounded forester having secreted himself from further danger, and being occupied with bandaging his wound. The head forester advanced to the edge of the moat, waving his cap on the end of his bow as a token of his pacific intentions, and loudly demanded, in the name of the king, that Roger and his son should give themselves up to him as king's prisoners. The only answer he received was another

shot from Robin's bow, which carried his cap off the end of his bow and lodged it in the branches of a tree fifty paces behind. This seemed to make the forester angry, and he beat a hasty retreat to the cover of a friendly tree. The foresters had had previous proof of Robin's skill in sundry attacks upon his father's house, but were not aware that it was his hand that had already committed such freaks amongst them. Roger now rejoined his son and nephew, and Will proposed that they should sally out and fight the foresters in the open field; but Roger, though confident in the superiority of his friends, did not care to provoke more bitter animosity than what had been already engendered between them. Ivy Harper chimed in with Roger, and Will, though stoutly seconded by Robin, felt that his father's advice was more sound. They were roused from their consultation by a shower of arrows rattling against the building, some stray arrows glancing into the open square and striking the outer face of the opposite buildings. All the arrows fell harmless. The besieged each selected an opening in the wall, and, with an arrow fitted on the string, watched for an opportunity to shoot, but the foresters were too wary and kept well under cover. Will, who soon grew tired of watching without getting a chance for a shot, proposed to Robin that they should throw open the casement and tempt the foresters by shewing themselves. This was done, and both Robin and Will looked out towards the forest. They saw that they were noticed, and that the foresters were preparing to shoot. Robin

drew quietly on one side, and ran to the end of the loft, where he thought he should have a fair opportunity to shew his skill on some luckless forester. In a moment he saw a leg uncovered by the tree which hid the rest of the body of the forester, and taking steady aim, the arrow stuck in the outstretched limb. At the same moment several arrows flew in at the casement, one of which glanced from the edge of the timber, and entered the side of Ivy Harper, who, not knowing that the casement was open, was coming up, with his trusty bow in hand, to the assistance of his friends. Will, who was using the shutter as a sort of shield at the moment, heard a heavy sigh, and starting forward, caught the old man as he was on the point of falling. The arrow had fixed itself in Harper's side, and the stream of blood which poured forth told too truly that the wound was mortal. The casement was hastily closed, and summoning his father and others in the loft, they prepared to carry the old man down the ladder into the hall. Robin was first sent down to break the news to Marian, who, with Dame Hood, was busily engaged preparing a few bandages in case of an accident.

"Marian, prepare to receive a patient," Robin said. There was something in his manner from which she guessed who it was.

"My father!" she exclaimed, clutching Robin by the arm; "it must not be!"

Robin for a moment made no reply. Then, seeing the truth must soon be known, he gently held her back, and bade her summon all her courage and con-

trol her feelings, lest she should distress her father and the excitement make his hurt dangerous. Marian and Dame Hood at once made a bed of rushes and straw, on which a hide was laid, while Robin assisted in lowering the wounded man.

"Where's the friar?" inquired Roger. Then only did they discover that he had not been seen since the first arrow had so unceremoniously disturbed poor Harper's song. At length he was found in one of the outbuildings sound asleep, and, on being aroused, urged that men of religion, like himself, were not allowed to fight by the rules of their order, and a feeling of self-preservation prevented him from exposing himself wantonly to the arrows of the enemy. On hearing that Harper had been wounded, however, he hastened willingly to give what consolations were in his power. The friar found the old man laid upon the bed. The arrow had been withdrawn and his side bandaged; but no skill could have availed to save him, and all who were round saw that his life was slowly ebbing away. Marian knelt by her father's side, his head resting on her left arm, while her right hand clasped his.

"Marian," the old man was saying, in a very calm voice, "I shall soon be where no more arrows can be shot, no more wounds inflicted; where your mother already is, Marian, and where, Marian, you must join us one day."

"Dying!" quoth the friar; "who speaks of dying? let the living man trust in God."

"Nay," said the old man; "I am dying, but I have

trust in God, and though not for longer life here, a better one elsewhere."

"Father, you must not talk of dying; I cannot live without you." Marian's sob interrupted her words, for she felt that his words were true, and saw his eye was even then glazing.

"Roger," said the dying man, "look after my Marian. Robin, as you love"—

"Peace be with his soul!" exclaimed the friar; "to prayers."

Falling on their knees, the friar recited the prayers for the departing.

The sentence on the old man's lips remained unfinished, and while words of holy intercession were being uttered, his head suddenly dropped upon his breast, and his soul passed into the presence of the Saviour and the Judge.





CHAPTER II.

The besieged avenge Harper's Death—His Burial in the Forest—Friar Goodly returns to Narrowflask Abbey—The Friar's surprise at finding his Theft discovered—The Abbot's Sentence—Robin on his way to Gamewell meets Marian in the Forest—The Greenwood Glen.



AFTER the death of Harper nothing could restrain Roger and his friends from venturing into the forest to revenge the old man's death.

They armed themselves with spears in addition to their bows and arrows; and the first intimation that the foresters had of the change of tactics on the part of the besieged was their appearance in the field. Their advance was met by a shower of arrows from the foresters, which flew wide of their intended destination; and, with their spears in hand, Roger and his men advanced quickly to dislodge them from their hiding-places. The latter knew they were no match for their opponents, and as they had no other weapon with them besides their bows, they beat a hasty

retreat towards the heart of the forest, covering themselves as best they might while they ran. Roger was not unwilling to let the men escape, and restrained his followers from joining too hotly in pursuit, urging them to content themselves by annoying their adversaries with such flesh wounds as they were able to inflict upon the limbs of the flying foe. This was done with considerable skill on the part of the Saxons, whose superiority in the use of the bow had been established in many contests; and scarcely one of the retreating party escaped without a sorrowful remembrance of the churlish attack on Gamewell House.

The sun having sunk low in the western sky before Roger and his friends had thus chased the foresters away, they returned from the chase heavy with sorrow at the sad loss they had sustained. They found Marian sitting with her father's head in her lap. She had washed his face with her tears, and kissed his lips, calling him the while, "Father! father!" with an earnest bitter sorrow, as though she would not believe he was dead. No entreaties had induced her to leave him, and the friar saw that for a time his ministrations would fall unheeded on a heart that was then unable to discharge itself of its load of grief. So he wisely withdrew, and watched from a distance what passed. When Roger and Robin, Will and Deerfoot, Hidehead and the others, returned, it was resolved that Marian should be separated from the body of her father, while the simple rites of burial were gone through. So Robin gently raised her up,

his mother taking the cold head in her arms, and laying it down upon the hide; and Marian, seeing that they were determined in what they did, suffered herself to be led away to where the friar sat on a stool, repeating his evening prayers. The body of her father was borne out of the great hall, and placed in one of the outhouses, on some rough planks. Robin whispered such words of comfort into Marian's ear as a heart in loving sympathy naturally dictates. The flood of sorrow burst in uncontrollable streams from Marian's heart, and the extremity of her grief was fathomed. When those in the hall saw her weeping, they felt they might venture on soothing words of comfort, and so gathered round her, each speaking a loving word, and each giving her a loving Saxon kiss, and calling her "daughter" and "sister." But Robin whispered another name in her ear, and claimed to be in the future her protector and helper. Round the fire—a large one kindled in the centre of the hall—they reclined on straw, rushes, or hides, neighbours and dependents alike; and while the bright fire blazed and the wood crackled, and showers of fiery sparks flew out, they told in loving terms the story of old Ivy Harper's life, his prowess, his battles, his sorrows, and his wrongs. When several hours had passed, Marian arose and crept silently towards the door, but Robin followed her, notwithstanding that she waved him back with her hand. He would follow, because he knew wherefore she rose, and whither she was going. Out upon the lawn they passed together, not a word being spoken by either.

The moon was shining brightly, and a gentle breeze sang among the trees in the forest, a soft murmur filling the air, as though the trees themselves were conscious of the blood that had been shed, and joined in the mourning. While the moon looked down coldly and unconcernedly, and seemed further off, and more out of reach of all human comprehension than ever, Marian and Robin passed into the outhouse where, covered simply with a hide, lay the remains of Ivy Harper. Marian started when she saw the outline of the body beneath the hide, but it was only for a moment; then by an effort nerving herself, she stood by the head of the rude bier, and slowly removing the hide, disclosed the pale face of her beloved father. There was no fond response now to the passionately loving kiss she imprinted on his brow. She would have sat during the remainder of the night on the ground beside him, but Robin gently drew her away, and led her back to the unhappy circle they had left in the large hall.

In the morning a grave was dug in the forest beneath an old oak-tree that had outlived the flight of centuries, and the body of Ivy Harper was laid in it to mingle its dust with that from whence it came. Over the grave a wooden cross was raised, and long years after, wayfarers who passed by—strangers and friends—breathed a prayer, from love or courtesy, for the peace of the dead man's soul.

Roger complained to his baron of the bad treatment they had received from the foresters. These men were held in aversion by all the country. The

baron himself was fond of a little exercise in the way of hunting the deer, but objected to any one else on his estate doing the like. The blood that had been shed in this instance induced the baron to consider the matter more gravely than he otherwise would. He was accustomed to hear of his people being beaten by the foresters, and, on the whole, thought it was wholesome discipline for them, and cared little so long as his own weaknesses were passed by unnoticed. It seemed different, however, when the foresters proceeded to extremities, and upon such slight grounds of suspicion. Considering every circumstance of the case, the baron determined on sending a message to the nearest forester, whom he threatened to bring before an itinerant court of justice, which had just then been established, for compensation on account of the death of Ivy Harper. This had the effect of bringing one of the principal delinquents, after the expiration of a few weeks, before the baron, who contented himself with receiving a pledge that in future they would abstain from such violent measures. The forester declared that his party had lost more blood altogether than the body of one man contained, and was loath to allow that they, acting in the king's name, had not the full right they claimed of apprehending, judging, and punishing offenders against the forest laws.

On the morning of the burial of Harper, Friar Goodly had taken leave of his friends and returned, with a heavy heart, to the Abbey of Narrowflask. Not that he felt unable to give a satisfactory account

of his absence, but some doubts had arisen in his mind whether an awkward discovery of the trick he had played upon the cellarer might not have taken place. These doubts grew almost into conviction on his meeting, in the forest, with a friar of another order, which was always taken as a sign of ill luck. The abbey was distant ten miles from Gamewell House, and stood in the centre of one of the richest pasturages in the county. The abbey lands embraced several hundreds of acres, most of which had been left by rich men, who by bequeathing their land for religious uses when they had no further need of it, believed they secured their souls' salvation. But some of the land had been acquired by skilful trading on the part of the abbot, who was always very ready to lend hard cash to needy persons possessed of lands, and was content with enormous interest. The vassals of the abbey supplied the establishment with everything that was required for the use of the inmates, food for the wants of pilgrims or strangers, and luxuries for the entertainment of richer guests.

The abbot, Simon de Need-all, was an austere man, grave as a modern judge, and severe as an executioner. There had been a little quarrelling over his appointment, the Church and State coming into collision very frequently over the right of presentation. Simon was a Church favourite, and as such felt himself called upon to exhibit considerable independence towards all the liege subjects of the king. Every breach of discipline in the abbey was regarded as tainted with the original dispute of the abbot's elec-

tion, and was visited with the severest monastic penalties. Now it happened that Friar Goodly had been noticed on the morning of the Gamewell feast returning from the direction of the cellar. Brother Gasphard, who had been at prayer at that very moment in a recess near the spot where the cellarer slept, had been disturbed in his religious exercises by the friar's stealthy step, and opening the corner of one eye, without pausing in his devotions, took in the full proportions of his brother, and saw him replace the keys with a smothered laugh by the sleeper's side. When the cellarer awoke, he was informed by Friar Gasphard of what he had seen ; and an examination of the abbot's wine-bin revealed the theft that had taken place. The abbot's indignation on hearing of this breach of privilege was very great, and the whole of the friars were ordered to half rations and special psalms until the absentee made his appearance. But Friar Goodly made no obeisance before the abbot that night ; and it was not till the afternoon of the next day that his figure was discovered by the warder on duty. At the precise moment he knocked at the little wicket gate, his appropriation of the wine was chased from his mind by the intervening events, which had been of so startling a character. When, therefore, he met his superior pacing up the courtyard, looking unusually flushed, he was for the moment at a loss to understand what had disturbed him. But his curiosity was more than satisfied by the first query of the abbot.

“ What about my wine, sirrah ? ” The abbot planted

himself opposite to the astonished sinner. The friar was not at a loss for an answer.

"I took it for a sick man," he replied, "who died the same afternoon, and whose body was buried by me in the forest this morning,"

"Oh!" quoth the abbot. "Follow me."

Into the abbey the two strode, the friars they met standing meekly aside while they passed, and crossing themselves for deliverance from their brother's sin. The cellarer, and Friar Gasphard, who had seen the delinquent with the keys, were summoned. Gasphard told his story, and the cellarer his. Friar Goodly made no attempt to conceal his guilt; but threw himself on the mercy of the abbot. Looking at the grievousness of the sin, which presented to his mind a threefold aspect,—1st, Taking advantage of a man of trust sleeping; 2d, Appropriating wine reserved for the abbot's private table; and 3d, Absenting himself for a whole day and night without leave,—the abbot declared that the highest punishment in his power to inflict would hardly satisfy the merits of the case. However, considering that Goodly had confessed his fault, he would content himself with awarding one punishment instead of three, as he deserved, and would mercifully order him to be confined to his cell for six weeks, during which time he must, in addition to his ordinary number of prayers, sing three hundred psalms every four-and-twenty hours, and be supplied with bread and water only. If there was one thing Friar Goodly disliked more than another, it was the fast-days of the Church; and a bread-and-water diet

he utterly abhorred. There was no help for him, however, and he was politely escorted by the cellarer and Brother Gasphard to his cell, where he forthwith commenced in the lowest and most melancholy note of his voice to chant the first instalment of his psalms for the day.

Robin and his mother stayed with Roger Gamewell several days after the funeral of Ivy Harper. The woodhouse and land the deceased had occupied were let by Baron Holdhard to another dependent, and Marian was persuaded to make Gamewell thenceforward her home. Robin and his mother were vassals of Baron de Hardacre, whose lands bordered those of Baron Holdhard, and they resided about fourteen miles from Gamewell House. The Hoods were wanderers from their native soil, and had been driven, while Robin was a boy, from their land in the pretty valley of the Loxley, to seek a settlement elsewhere. They had wandered, suffering many hardships, through Sherwood Forest, until they came to Gamewell House, where they were entertained several days, and ultimately took up their abode at Speedswift, with the gracious approval of Baron Holdhard. Peter Hood, Robin's father, was, like Roger Gamewell, the descendant of an old Saxon family. Now that Marian was settled at Gamewell, Dame Hood was anxious to return to Speedswift with the tidings of what had befallen the Gamewells and Ivy Harper; and a grave suspicion haunted her more than once, that the foresters, after their defeat, might have troubled her husband with their presence. On

several occasions they had visited his house, which was not so well adapted for the purposes of defence as Gamewell, and had levied toll of liquors and food in a most insulting manner. But Marian was unwilling that Dame Hood should leave her; and Robin added his entreaties to those of Roger Gamewell and Will, and so several days elapsed before they started home. Robin was pleased that his interviews with Marian were likely to be more frequent than when she lived at home with her father in Ivy House, which was more than twenty miles from Speedswift.

On arriving at their home, Robin and his mother found that the foresters had indeed visited Speedswift, but that it was to have their wounds dressed; and from their account of what had taken place, Peter Hood discovered that they had paid Gamewell a hostile visit. All the foresters had wounds, some of them had been shot in several places; and fierce threats of vengeance were muttered against Roger and his son. The men had remained at Speedswift a night and a day; and Peter Hood had good reason to suspect, from what they let fall before their departure, that Robin was amongst the number of those they encountered at Gamewell. He was very much pleased to see both wife and son back again in safety, but was much grieved to hear of Ivy Harper's death. Robin urged his father to make their house as safe as possible, so as to enable them to resist any attack that might be made by the foresters at a future time. With this view, the house, which consisted of one long room with a flat roof, was strengthened as much

as possible by additional timber posts; and a rude loft was also constructed on the roof, the sides of which were perforated, to allow of their shooting at any person who might venture to annoy them. The doorway on the ground-floor was fastened up and secured on the inside, so that now entrance could only be effected by means of a ladder from the outside, placed against the loft.

The summer was fading into autumn when these alterations were accomplished, and Robin got leave to visit Gamewell, where he had not been since the fight. Taking his bow and a full quiver of arrows with him, Robin entered the forest to walk to Gamewell.

Sherwood Forest at this time extended over a great portion of the counties of Nottingham, Derby, and York. Round its borders there were scattered hamlets and several large towns; while through the forest there ran certain great high-roads, which led to the principal towns. Sherwood abounded with game of all descriptions, so that when the unfortunate Saxons were sorely pressed by their enemies, they had little difficulty in sustaining themselves in their sylvan retreat; and it sometimes required an armed band of soldiers to dislodge them. Robin, who was well acquainted with its by-ways, scorned the high-roads that travellers sought, and struck out into the depths of the forest, cutting through the great centres, where the trees grew so close as to afford the safest hiding-place that could be found. He knew of short cuts, that led by routes as straight as the crow flew, from

point to point. The forest had many attractions for a lover of nature in all her wild picturesque beauty, and abounded with charming landscapes of infinite variety. There were hills thickly studded with trees to their very summits, and valleys, along the bosom of which rivulets ran, that were destined in future years to give names to flourishing towns. These streams abounded with trout and fish of several kinds, and their capture afforded the monks in neighbouring abbeys hours of amusement, besides being the means of furnishing their tables with fresh fish on fast-days. There were groves of oaks that were great trees at the time of the Conquest, and had not ceased to grow even then. There were also countless other trees, in which the birds built their nests, and held undisturbed possession, and from the branches of which they filled the air with sounds of sweetest melody.

The ground was carpeted with luxurious grass, and thickly studded with such wild flowers as the season called into existence. There was heather in great patches, in which the hares and rabbits lived; and acres of yellow gorze-bushes, over which the nightingale, bowered in the branch of some favourite tree, sang by night her plaintive song to the moon and stars. There were extensive lakes, on which the swan built her nest, and the wild-duck made her home; and groups of trees hard by, where the heron, on the topmost branches, trained up her little ones. The forest also abounded, in those parts where the oaks grew in greatest numbers, with wild-hogs, that lived upon the acorns, and were hunted either by the rich

abbots and their visitors for sport, or by the poor Saxons for food. Besides these, there were deer in numerous herds, that loved open glades and water-brooks, and moved timidly away at the approach of man. There was a time when a haunch of venison was a common dish on the table of the Saxon borderer of the forest; but the cruel Norman laws made it a dangerous one, because by them a deer's life was esteemed of more worth than a man's ear.

Robin had been bred in the midst of such scenes as Sherwood afforded; he had had his schooling among the trees, and in the glades, and had naturally imbibed a strong love for a wild forest-life. When very young, a mark set upon a tree formed his target, and he had acquired such skill in the use of his bow, as to excel all with whom he had come in contact.

But that day Robin paid little heed to the fair marks that were offered for his skill, as he strode through the forest on his way to Gamewell. His mind was busied with other thoughts—those of Marian mingling with others of the many foes by whom they were surrounded. A dim remembrance of his boyhood's home in the valley of the Loxley, came up like a distant view of a beautiful landscape that fades too soon from sight. He was startled, however, from his reverie by the sound of his own name, and looking before him, saw Marian, with her bow in one hand, and a couple of ducks suspended from her girdle. She had been in the forest since an early hour of the morning, and was on the point of return-

ing when they thus met. Her fair flaxen hair was decked with wild-flowers, and her face flushed with walking. She carried in her other hand a forester's horn, which was attached to a worked girdle.

"This is for you, Robin," she said, their greetings over; "I've sounded it every time I came into the forest, in the hope of meeting you here."

Robin took it from her, and praised the pretty work about the girdle, then kissed it, and hanging it round his neck, took hold of Marian's hand and vowed that never, so long as he lived, would he part with that horn, for the love he bore to her whose handiwork the girdle was.

A deeper flush overspread Marian's face at Robin's impassioned language, which told him more plainly than words could speak that Marian loved him. Robin had but a few arrows to give her from his quiver, which would perversely stick when he attempted to draw them forth, and Marian laughed and said they would not come out willingly, and she would not have them; but she did take them after all, though she said they were useless, as she should never shoot with them. They rambled through the forest in the very opposite direction to that which would have led them to Gamewell, until they came to a part where the trees grew thickly together. It was a natural harbour formed of gigantic trees, whose roots had become twined and intertwined, and whose trunks in some places sided up against each other, their great arms interlacing in wondrous fashion. Amongst these trees they passed until they came upon an open

space of nearly an acre in extent. This Marian called the heart of Sherwood. It was her favourite haunt, and where, she believed, no human foot beside her own had ever trodden.

It was, indeed, a lovely spot. The ground was covered with the sweetest of bright wild-flowers, and the air was filled with the melodious songs of birds, that seemed to dedicate Nature's temple to Nature's God. Robin was much pleased with the discovery of such a spot, but seeing a fine heron flying towards them, hastily strung his bow. Marian, however, forbade him, on penalty of her displeasure, from killing a bird in her retreat; and, holding her bow towards Robin, exacted from him a vow that he would never himself shoot an arrow at bird, beast, or human being that crossed the place on which they then stood. There was one old oak which stood forth out of the circle of his fellows, a little in advance, as though he was their leader, or had gone out to marshal his brethren and been suddenly transfixed where he stood. The appearance of this tree had previously led Marian to the conclusion that it was the patriarch of the grove. Round the gnarled and twisted trunk, and high up amongst the branches, there had grown a fresh green ivy, which had completely encircled the tree, so that the original bark was completely hidden. Marian called Robin's attention to this tree, which she called "Sherwood's King;" but Robin, who had seen some older trees in other parts of the forest, proposed that it should be named henceforth "The Greenwood-tree," to which Marian at once assented;

and, going up to it, Robin blew three blasts upon the horn that Marian had given him in honour of the christening. The sound rang through the forest, echoing amongst the trees, and growing fainter and fainter, until like a whisper it died on the air. This was the first blast Robin sounded in this spot; but the notes of that horn, which then only startled the birds and the deer, were destined to sound with deeper significance in the ears of man ere long. As they threaded their way out of the Greenwood Glen, Marian shewed Robin how to find his own way there, guiding himself by particular trees near which they passed. Robin was an apt scholar in all forest matters, and learned his lesson thoroughly under the gentle teaching of his guide. It was late in the afternoon before they reached the border of the forest adjacent to Gamewell. Roger had been on the lookout for Marian, being uneasy at her long absence; but, while helping to drag the trunk of a tree across the moat, had heard, or fancied he heard, the dying echoes of a horn in the forest repeated three times. These proceeded from notes that he knew could not have been blown by Marian; and he had guessed whom she had found, and the cause of her delay. When the two came up to the moat, Roger, with a pretended austerity of manner, that sat ill on his jovial countenance, bade Robin never blow his horn in the forest again, or he would bring all the foresters together; and then he might think himself lucky if he escaped from them by the sacrifice of his ears only.



CHAPTER III.

Marian, Robin, and Will slay a Buck in the Forest—On their return they meet with Gammer and Gruff, and have a serious Fight—The Rovers conquer the Foresters, and make them carry the Buck's Hide to Gamewell.

ROBIN told with much glee of the discovery Marian had made in the forest, and the name which they had given to the old oak-tree. Will Gamewell asked if they had also named the glade in which it stood, and laughingly suggested that it should be called the Lovers' Dingle ; while his father, still maintaining his assumed severity, declared he would have the trees hewn down, or the place would only serve to foster their love for killing the king's deer, by affording them a means of escaping from foresters when they might be hard pressed. A solitary buck for the household, whenever there was a real want of food, he never objected to ; but to hunt the deer for the sake of the sport, and to bring in the head and hide, he most decidedly did. This was met by a burst of laughter from Marian and Will, who, pointing to the end of the

hall, which was covered with the antlered heads of deer that Roger Gamewell himself had killed, declared that when they were able to count the same number as one year's trophies, they would be content, and would shoot no more. Marian and Robin vowed that they would never take any one into the Greenwood Glen, unless for sport or to escape from danger; and, even then, they would blindfold them first.

The following morning Robin, Marian, and Will Gamewell went into the forest for some sport. The glories of autumn had commenced; the leaves of the trees, having done their summer duty, were, from every hue of green, changing to many coloured tints of decay. They were loosening their hold of the branches they had covered with such beauty during the summer; and, as the wind rustled among them, slowly fluttered down, as though unwilling to leave their spring and summer home for the autumn dance on the ground. There were plenty of trees in the forest that always kept their light green dresses, and these were the redeeming features of the forest, when the beauties of autumn had departed. But besides the trees there were yet many other attractions, some of which have already been named; and this morning there was a secret compact amongst the three friends, that when they returned they would bring with them the finest antlered head they saw. Each carried a bow and quiver of arrows, and three fairer shots could not have been found in the forest. They had not gone far before they caught sight of several deer, that started up as they heard the sound of

human voices, and, after glancing timidly in the direction whence the voices came, trotted further off into the depths of the forest, to give notice to the rest of the herd of the supposed approach of danger. None of these, however, wore the horns the trio wanted, and they began to fear that they would have ill luck, when an unusual stir amongst the leaves in their immediate vicinity caused each of them to place an arrow quickly on the string, and stand ready for a shot. In a moment there stepped before them a magnificent buck, who knocked the branches of the trees aside with his horns. On seeing the three intruders, he paused for a moment, while his dilated nostrils and low panting snort plainly told of his anger at being disturbed. His gigantic horns spoke his patriarchal age, and leadership of a herd somewhere at hand, to whom he had given a signal, as was evidenced by a hurried scrambling among the trees at a short distance. After a moment's pause, during which the astonishment of all seemed about equal, the antlered champion shook his head and advanced towards Will Gamewell, who stood apart from Robin and Marian. It was evident that he meant mischief, and would, if possible, butt his antagonist. Will raised his bow and drew the string, but had no time to let the arrow fly, before the deer, bending his head, sprang forward, and Will was but just able to leap aside to avoid the blow from his horns. Robin called to him to run, but Will nimbly grasped a branch of a tree and swung himself out of reach. Now it was the turn of Robin and Marian. Seeing the fighting propensity

of the animal, they had taken shelter behind a large oak. On losing Will, however, it turned in the direction where they were hiding, and slowly advanced. Not a moment was to be lost. Marian raised her bow, and, as with bent head and increased speed the deer came on, an arrow pierced its side. The beautiful creature gave a sudden bound, and then fell dead to the ground.

"That was well shot!" exclaimed Robin, with much warmth.

"It was one of your arrows," Marian replied, "and I would not on any account lose it."

"Bravo!" shouted Will from his place of safety, as he saw his enemy fall to the ground. "Well done, Marian! a woman's arrow has saved two lives."

"Three lives, three lives," urged Robin; "for if it had not been for Marian we should have been either killed by the deer or shot by the foresters."

Marian stepped up to their prostrate assailant, and patted his great head with her hand, upbraiding herself the while with slaying so faithful a lord of his herd. Will, meanwhile, leaped down to the ground; and all three, the danger over, had a hearty laugh at the novel position in which they had been placed. Robin and Will drew their knives, and prepared to skin the animal, and cut off his head, while Marian gathered some dry sticks and leaves, to make a fire on which to broil some steaks. By working hard they soon stripped the hide off, and with some difficulty also severed the head. They then threw the skin over the branch of a tree, intending to call for it

on their return from the Greenwood Glade; and, after refreshing themselves with the broiled venison and water from a running stream, they marked the trees in the neighbourhood, and pressed forward into the forest.

At length Marian, whose knowledge of the part they now came to was complete, led them to the border of the glade; and after blindfolding Will, he was led forward into the open space already described. Will's astonishment was only equalled by the delight of Robin and Marian. With mock solemnity, Marian led Will to the Greenwood-tree, and, seating him on the mossy bank at its base, hailed him a forest rover. Robin gathered an armful of wild flowers, and Marian plaited them into a coronet, with which she crowned Will's brow; and, as a fitting conclusion to the ceremony, Robin blew three blasts upon his horn. Before leaving the glade, Robin and Will each cut a strong quarterstaff from one of the trees, upon which they meant to carry the deer's hide home between them.

It so happened, however, that the sound of the horn was heard by two of the foresters, Gammer and Gruff, who were returning from Nottingham. They had been into the town to see the sheriff, before whom they laid the story of their sufferings at Gamewell, and the subsequent interference of Baron de Holdhard on behalf of the obnoxious Saxons. They made out against the Gamewells a very strong case, as a one-sided representation always is.

The sheriff, whose name was Shrimp, was a mighty

little man, full of the dignity of his office. He esteemed himself the greatest man in Nottingham, not even excepting the governor of the castle. He sympathised strongly with the foresters, and swore he would capture the Gamewells, and burn their house to the ground. The foresters invariably kept the sheriff's larder stocked with the choicest meats that the forest yielded, so that it was not unnatural that he should lend a ready ear to their tale, and promise to avenge their wrongs. He declared that on a certain day he would march out of Nottingham, with a number of the king's officers, specially selected for the work by himself; and that, with the assistance of the foresters, he would bring the criminals to justice. Gammer, who was the chief forester of the Nottingham range, vowed on the spot that he would double the sheriff's allowance of venison, and departed with Gruff, chuckling at the success of the scheme. On their way back through the forest, profiting by past experience, they were planning how they might push the sheriff and his force into the forefront of the siege, so as to keep their own skins whole. While these pleasant thoughts were passing through their minds they caught the sound of Robin's horn. Both stopped, and looked at each other in astonishment. From the very depths of the forest the sound seemed to have come; and while they yet listened, a second and a third blast, faint in the distance, but nevertheless clear and distinct, struck upon their ears.

“There are some rogues amongst the deer again,”

Gammer said; "that horn is not from one of our men."

Gruff doubted whether it was so, because the deer-slayers, he urged, were more quiet about their work, and knew the sound of a horn would attract a forester's ears. At this moment there broke through the trees before them a herd of deer, that passed at a smart run on towards the border of the forest in the direction of Nottingham. The appearance of these deer confirmed Gammer in his opinion that there had been some poaching going on, and he determined to proceed in the direction from whence the sound came. They carried with them bows and arrows; but, believing they might have need of another weapon, determined to provide themselves with serviceable oaken quarterstaves. Selecting a young oak for the purpose, they speedily procured the weapons they desired. They then pressed forward into the forest, and met in succession several other herds, all coming from the same quarter, which had evidently been startled by something unusual that had occurred. After some time had elapsed, they came to the very spot where early in the morning Robin and his friends had had the encounter with the deer. There lay the body of the buck, divested of his hide and head, and on a tree near at hand hung the missing head and coat. Gammer grinned his intense satisfaction at the discovery, and came to the conclusion that the slayers of the noble beast were still in the forest, and that they intended to carry the trophy of their lawless exploit away with them. Gruff, who

had ventured in the outset to differ from his chief, vowed over the body of the buck that Gammer was the most extraordinary man that had ever roamed the forest, and called himself hard and bad names for having ventured to dispute his sagacious observations on the sound of the horn.

At Gammer's suggestion they cut two thin strips from the hide, with which to bind the offenders; and on the end of each strip they constructed a running noose. His long walk had made Gruff hungry, although he had some few hours previously done amazing justice to the viands set before him by the sheriff. He proposed, therefore, that, while they waited the coming of the offenders, they should have a thin slice of venison broiled. Gammer assented, and two delicate slices were very speedily broiling on a small fire that Gruff made. They had scarcely finished the repast when the sound of laughter drove them in hiding behind a tree, from whence they watched for the appearance of the unsuspecting hunters. On seeing the three, Gammer exclaimed,—

“There's Robin Hood, the keenest bowman that can be found in all Nottingham; and Will Game-well, son of old Roger; and Marian Harper, who owes us little love.”

“Shall I shoot?” whispered Gruff, preparing at the same time to fit an arrow to his bow.

“No, no; down!” said Gammer; “they'd pin us to the trees in a twinkling;” and, seeing the bow in Marian's hand, growled to himself, “three to two is one too many, although one's a woman.”

Unconscious of the excitement their arrival had created, Robin and Will threw aside their bows and staves, and prepared to take down the hide.

"Now," exclaimed Gammer, "now's our time ; hit hard."

So saying, Gammer and Gruff sprang from their hiding-place, and, with quarterstaves upraised, dashed out upon the rovers. In an instant Robin sprang forward, and, before Gammer had time to strike a blow, seized him by the legs, and flung him backwards on his head with a heavy fall. At the same moment Will had seized Gruff round the waist, twisted the staff from his hands, and engaged him in a sharp wrestle. Marian, whose head and bust had been crowned with wild-flowers, stood perfectly bewildered at the suddenness of the assault. Recovering from her surprise, she fitted an arrow to her string, as though she would shoot Gammer should he attempt to rise. Robin seeing this, called upon her to stay her hand. Gammer lay for a moment stunned with his heavy fall, and Robin, standing over him, watched the wrestling between Gruff and Will. The latter had the advantage of youth on his side, but his opponent was a heavy man ; and after vainly endeavouring to throw him, Will suddenly tripped him up, and he fell prostrate on the ground. On recovering his senses, Gammer challenged Robin to a bout with the quarterstaff, which Robin gladly accepted ; and Gruff and Will determined likewise to try their skill. Before commencing, Gammer proposed that Robin and Will should surrender to them as the king's

foresters ; and promised, if they would go with them quietly through the forest to Nottingham, that he would intercede on their behalf, so as to save them from the extreme penalty which the law awarded to their crime. Robin rejected the proposal with scornful merriment, and the foresters took up their staves and prepared, with ill-concealed alarm, to cross with their youthful opponents. Marian stood by, evidently very much concerned for the safety of her two friends. The foresters commenced with manifest caution, standing entirely on the defensive, and springing back lightly, avoided two or three well-aimed blows, any one of which would have inflicted an undesirable sore upon them. Gammer, who was to all appearance the more formidable of the two rangers, after fencing for some time, threw out his staff for a blow at his antagonist's head, which Robin escaped by a skilful guard, and at the same time brought his own staff with such force on the left side of his opponent as to evoke a loud grunt from his lips. This blow, which was the first inflicted, did not increase Gammer's amiability, and he struck out wildly at his opponent's head, arms, body, and legs, but without coming home once, while every motion of Robin's arm told of a corresponding and effective blow on some unguarded part. Gammer grew furious as each successive thud made his limbs and sides ache with pain ; he then failing even to reach the body of his youthful adversary. Stroke succeeded stroke on poor Gammer's hide, until, after three successive blows on the top of his head, which caused the blood

to stream over his face, he suddenly threw himself upon Robin, and tried to bear him down by superior weight. Robin, nothing loth, being skilled in this mode of contest, cast aside his well-used staff, and seizing the fellow round the waist, in a moment hurled him to the ground with such force that this time he was completely stunned.

Meanwhile Will and Gruff had been fighting with varying success. Gruff was evidently more practised in the use of the weapon than his master, and gave Will no small amount of trouble. They had been fighting more cautiously than Robin and Gammer; but it was evident that Gruff was rapidly growing unequal to the contest. Will was as lithe as a young sapling, and, much to Gruff's disgust, skipped about in an exceedingly lively manner to avoid his blows. By so doing he was rapidly wearing Gruff out, whose short heavy breathings indicated his exhausted state. Robin, after wiping the perspiration from his face, called upon Will to push the contest; and, inspired by his friend's voice, Will let fly an unexpected blow, which descended so forcibly on the unhappy pate of Gruff as to fell him like an ox to the ground.

It was now Marian's turn to play her part, but it was that of a kind and gentle nurse. Gammer, who had recovered from his insensibility, was still bleeding profusely, and Marian tore some bandages from her linen dress, which she soaked in the river, and with them attempted to stanch the bleeding. These attentions were received with grim complacency, her patient muttering the while that he had not done with





Robin. Evidently the thought of defeat had been as sore a punishment to Gammer as the blows he had received. Robin was of too noble a disposition to taunt a beaten foe, and contented himself by urging that the forester had drawn the punishment upon himself by interfering in the first place. Gruff, though he had not received any flesh-wound, was much hurt, and lay insensible for several minutes ; but Marian's attention shortly restored him. Will's condition was scarcely better than that of Gruff, and he lay panting on the ground exhausted with his efforts, while Marian doctored his adversary. As Robin went to the brook to quench his thirst, it so chanced that he passed the tree behind which Gammer and Gruff had been hiding. He stooped to pick up their bows, which lay there, and found the slips of hide with the noosed ends. Picking these up, he returned to where Marian was busily engaged with Gruff, and held them up to view. There could be no mistaking the object for which they had been manufactured, and a faint smile appeared on Gammer's countenance on seeing the discovery that had been made.

"Pray, what were these fine things for?" inquired Robin.

"To drag the buck home with," responded Gammer.

"It's false," Robin replied ; "they were intended for honest men's limbs ; but rogues shall wear them."

Robin deliberately proceeded to fasten Gammer's arms behind his back, to which Gammer made no violent opposition, contenting himself with threats

barely audible from between his teeth. In like manner Robin bound Gruff. Then with Will's assistance he fastened Gammer's and Gruff's quarterstaves between them in such a manner as to form a bearer, on which they cast the buck's hide. Gammer protested against this fresh indignity, but on Robin offering to release him if he wanted another quarter bout, he gave in.

The walk through the forest was anything but a safe one; and Gammer, hoping to meet with some of his fellow-rangers, contrived to delay the journey so long as to make it probable that they would not reach Gamewell until long after sunset. Robin, on the way, fearing he had lost all chance of leading a quiet life with the foresters again, spoke out openly of the games he had had in the forest hunting the king's deer; and expressing the hope that one day he should have another merry meeting with Gammer. But Gammer was not to be tempted into any disclosure of his future intentions, though he was meditating at the time a bitter and fearful revenge. Will likewise made up his mind that there was not much mercy to be expected for him at the hands of the foresters in the future. Gruff grumbled terribly at the weight of the buck's horns, which had been laid upon his shoulders on account of his having escaped with fewer bruises than Gammer. He was on the point of imploring Robin to ease his shoulders a little for him when he was suddenly stopped by Gammer, who bade him bear his burden like a man, and not beg a favour from a thief. On the other hand, Gammer felt no

compunction at asking a favour for himself, and several times at his request the party halted for a somewhat lengthened rest. His real objection to Gruff's request was the fear that, if any readjustment of the burden took place, the heavier portion would be transferred to him. Marian, as they walked along, was full of regrets at the unpleasant termination of the day's sport; and secretly blamed herself as the cause of all that had taken place, because it was through her that they had visited the forest that day, and it was from her hand, moreover, the stag had received its death. She whispered her fears to Robin, and expressed her deep sorrow to Will that she had been the unhappy cause of his receiving so many bruises in the fight with Gruff. Both Robin and Will laughed at her fears, and expressed their willingness to meet with any number of foresters, if she were only present to cheer them by her looks. At length they drew near Gamewell, and Gammer and Gruff shook the stag's hide from their shoulders, believing they were to be released there. But Robin insisted that they should see the inside of Gamewell House before he would free them; and Gammer's remonstrance only drew from him a repetition of the challenge made at the commencement of their homeward journey, which now, as then, effectually silenced him. The skin was replaced on the quarterstaves, and the party passed out of the forest, across the open glade in front of Gamewell, where the fight took place which left Marian an orphan. Here Robin blew a low blast on his horn, and Roger, with two or three men,

opened the timber gate and prepared to admit his friends, but when he saw the two foresters bound he was sorely puzzled.

"Who have you got there?" inquired Roger.

"Only a stag's hide," replied Will, quietly ignoring the existence of the two captives.

"But what do the foresters want?" asked Roger, preventing his men, at the same time, from laying the beams across the moat.

"Oh, they only want to see the inside of Game-well House, and test the quality of your best brew," said Robin, laughing, with Marian in chorus.

"It's all right," added Marian; "let us across, and we'll soon satisfy your curiosity."

Roger allowed the timbers to be placed into position for them, but was still amazed at the character of their companions. Over went Gammer and Gruff with dogged steps, and were led by Roger into the grass square, where they shook the hide from their shoulders with unfeigned satisfaction.

"Now release us," said Gammer; "your sport's over, but ours is to begin."

"Nay," said Roger, "the sport is not over yet; for I've a mind to hang the pair of you for the death of Ivy Harper."

Gammer laughed at the old man's threat, and demanded, in an angry tone, that they should at once be set at liberty, or he would revenge himself upon them. Robin commenced untying their bonds, while Marian brought them out a horn filled with liquor.

She was about to present it to Gammer, when Roger called out angrily,—

“Stay, Marian! would you feast the men who slew your father?”

Marian shrank at the words, and the horn fell from her hands. The thought that, perhaps, one of these very men might have sped the fatal arrow, had never entered her mind; and she stepped back as though there was pollution in their touch.

Gammer glared upon Roger, and ground his teeth with rage.

“Old man,” he said, holding up his hand menacingly, “look to yourself and your household; for I swear I’ll come here again before I’m expected, and bring those with me who will have satisfaction for the insult your son has this day given the king’s foresters.”

He turned on his heel as he spoke, and moved towards the entrance to the ground.

“Stay,” said Roger; “hear me; you’ve been here several times before, and you’ve always come like a thief, with your foresters at your back; but, the next time you come, no arrow shall fly from my bow except at your head.”

Gruff, who had maintained perfect silence since they had met Roger, seemed intensely anxious to be off. It was palpable that the meeting he had had that day had cured him of any desire to try his skill in the same way again. They picked up their bows and quivers, which Robin had carried, crossed the moat, and then stopped. Robin saw them press their bows

to their feet to string them, and greeted the action with loud laughter. He had cut the bowstrings partially through as he carried them in the forest, and the tension now snapped them. Baffled of their revenge, they retreated, shouting that on an early day both Robin and Will would meet with them again, under far different and greatly reversed circumstances.





CHAPTER IV.

Robin is suddenly summoned Home—His Father's Death—The Barbed Arrow—Friar Goodly's penitential Psalm-singing—Robin's Mother dies—The Burial of Robin's Parents—The Attack upon Speed-swift—Robin shoots the Sheriff of Nottingham—They burn Speed-swift, and retire to Gamewell.



AFTER the rough treatment Robin and Will had given Gammer and Gruff, they anticipated that the foresters would return very soon, bringing others with them, and that they would be subjected to another attack. Roger urged Robin to remain with them to assist in defending the place; and Robin scarcely needed much entreaty, for his love to Marian made him dread leaving her to the rude chance of being killed by some stray arrow. He, nothing loath, consented to remain; and they made preparations for the encounter. The men who belonged to Roger were set to work to cut long poles, with which, in case of need, to push down any adventurous forester who might chance to cross the moat, and attempt to scale the outworks. One end was sharpened, so as to

enable the person who wielded it to inflict a severe wound on the body of the foe. Fresh strings were manufactured for the bows; new bows fashioned; and a new stock of arrows, that had been seasoning for several months, were pointed and winged. In the winging of the arrows Marian was unusually expert; and with the assistance of Robin and Will in the pointing, a large supply was soon manufactured. Day by day a good look-out was kept in every direction, but there was not the slightest intimation of the anticipated conflict. Four days passed, and on the afternoon of the fifth the look-out heard the sound of horse's feet in the forest. The rider, if there was one, was spurring his steed at an unusual pace. The man gave the alarm, and the household were very shortly on a close look-out. Presently there emerged from amongst the trees a man on a bare-backed horse, who was immediately recognised by Robin as one of his father's dependents. He rode quickly up to the moat and called Robin Hood loudly.

The man had evidently been riding hard, and both he and the horse appeared much distressed. Robin threw open the casement, through which poor Ivy Harper had been shot, and called out to know what the man wanted.

"My poor master! my poor master!" the man sputtered.

"Well, well, what of him?" urged Robin petulantly, his worst fears being excited.

"He lies dead in the forest," replied the man.

Robin heard this intelligence in silence. For some moments he stood gazing at the man and the horse, as though he had not comprehended the full meaning of the dreadful news that had been told him. He turned, as Marian laid an arm gently upon his shoulder, and then the pent-up feelings of his heart broke forth in weeping.

"My father, my poor father!" he exclaimed; "and I not near him to draw a shaft in his defence!"

"God has left you one still," Marian whispered. "I have neither mother nor father left to me."

"The foresters have murdered him on my account. The blood of a Saxon is as swine's blood to the Norman; but," said Robin, clenching his fist, "my father's blood shall be avenged upon the proudest of them."

"'Tis bootless weeping," said Roger, kindly; "re-pining will only dispirit us; let us arm ourselves to avenge this fresh wrong. This is but the signal of what is about to be perpetrated. Our enemies are approaching."

The messenger from Speedswift was brought into Gamewell, while Robin prepared to return home. He promised to come back immediately his father was buried, and bring his mother and the men with him, believing that Speedswift would not afford much opposition to a combined attack from the foresters. Robin bade them all a sorrowful adieu, and flinging himself upon the bare back of his horse, rode off, carrying in his hand his ever-constant bow. The man who had brought the intelligence trudged

on foot by the horse's side, until they were out of sight of their Gamewell friends. On reaching Speed-swift, Robin was surprised to find his father's house occupied by a number of Norman vassals from the neighbourhood, who were drinking very freely of his father's liquor. Robin demanded what they meant by taking possession of his house in that way. Immediately one of the number rose with a drinking-horn in his hand, and said his name was Bully the coroner; and he had been summoned specially to hold an inquest on the body that had been found in the forest. Robin replied, that he had not summoned the coroner; but as he was there, he presumed the law must have its course. Robin was much surprised to find that the news of his father's death had reached Nottingham before he had heard of it, and some strong suspicions with regard to the foresters flashed across his mind. Leaving the coroner and jury drinking, he sought his mother, and was told that she was in the forest with the body of her husband. She had been sitting nursing the head of her husband ever since the discovery of his murder early in the morning. He went into the forest, and nearly a mile away from the house he came upon his mother sitting, as he had been informed, with her husband's head resting on her lap. There were two dependents sitting near her, whispering to each other. Robin threw himself with tears upon the body of his father, and kissed his cold forehead; his mother the while rocked herself to and fro, moaning, and seemed all unheeding of her son's presence. After

the first burst of grief, Robin clasped his mother in his arms, and chided himself with much bitterness as the cause of his father's death. But she rebuked him for his words. It was the hard heel of the Norman that was destined to crush out the Saxon life, she said ; and if they complained to man, it was only to their enemy ; there was no help for them here. Robin hoped, he said, that she would live to see the case reversed ; but his mother shook her head sternly, saying she had few days to live. The men who sat on the grass a short distance off now approached, and asked Robin whether they should bear the body to the house.

"After the coroner has seen him," Robin said ; "he's been sent for from Nottingham very suddenly, methinks."

"The coroner's already been here," one of the men replied, "and the jury's found"—

"That it's only the body of a Saxon," his mother interjected, with some bitterness ; "and as no one is harmed, no one can be punished."

Robin stood aghast at hearing this. The murder had been committed, the coroner informed, the jury brought, the inquest held, and the verdict given before even he had been able to reach the place. What had been bare suspicion before was now felt to be actual conviction—that the hand by whom his father had been murdered was one of the foresters he and Will had so roughly used in the forest.

Robin nodded assent to the proposed removal of the body, and the men raised the deceased between

them, when a broken arrow fell from his side. Robin saw it fall, stooped, and picking it up, examined it closely. The barbed point remained in the side of his father, and Robin made the men lay the body on the ground again, while he very carefully withdrew it. That the two parts formed the one arrow there could be no doubt, and on comparing the broken ends, they were found to fit exactly. The arrow was deeply stained with blood. On examining it, Robin saw plainly that it was not of Saxon manufacture. It was winged differently from a Saxon's arrow, and was finished with more care, as though it was designed rather for show than use. Closely examining it, Robin fancied he detected a mark scratched upon the wood. On discovering this, he quietly dropped it into his quiver, until he had more leisure to make out what the mark really was.

"Lead on!" Robin exclaimed; and the men raised the body of their master between them, and with slow steps walked in the direction of the house. Dame Hood declined the proffered help that Robin offered, and strode silently beside the bearers.

Her husband had left home in the early morning for the purpose of shooting some birds, and the first intimation she had of the sorrow that had befallen her was by the arrival of the coroner from Nottingham about noon. She heard the intelligence without a word, but heaved a deep sigh, and forthwith started with some dependents in search of the body. Nor had she exhibited the least outward manifestation of

grief, but a terrible silence seemed to weigh her down beyond the relief of tears.

The coroner and jury had left Speedswift when the mourners arrived, and Robin was informed that Bully had carried off with him his father's horse, leaving behind in exchange an old mare scarcely worth the food it ate.

A careful examination of the arrow with which his father had been killed enabled Robin to detect sundry marks, which convinced him that a forester had been the cause of his father's death. Between the feathers there was the outline of a crown, and beneath that a feather. About the middle of the arrow there was another outlined feather, and below, separated by the fracture which his father's fall had probably occasioned, there was the outline of a third arrow. Robin splintered the shaft and pieced them together, then fixed it in his quiver, with a solemn vow that he would never rest until he had discovered the owner, and with the same arrow revenged his father's death.

We left Friar Goodly in a previous chapter commencing in a low note the singing of his penitential psalms. The latticed window of his cell looked out upon a quadrangle, and on exactly the opposite side was the bedroom of the abbot. Goodly borrowed from some of his brethren a few spare strings of beads, until the number three hundred could be counted up. These he hung on the window of his cell, taking down a string at a time; and when he had exhausted it, he hung it up on the opposite side of

the window, and took down another string. The friar had a good memory, and could chant the whole of the Psalms without a book. This was, perhaps, not so much an accomplishment as a necessity, for his learning consisted of a very limited skill in reading, and he was but an indifferent hand as a copyist.

All afternoon he chanted, and when the shades of evening overspread the abbey, he was still chanting. Evening prayers ended, and the brethren repaired to their hard beds to sleep a few hours, the while Goodly kept on chanting. Friar Goodly heard the abbey bell ringing his brethren to the closing service of the day, and found, on making a hasty reckoning of his beads, that he had scarcely got through eighty of his psalms. Then it occurred to him that he had been going through the Psalms in succession, taking long and short as they came, and that, by pursuing the same plan, he would fain be obliged to borrow many hours of the night to complete his task for the first day, he therefore hit upon the expedient of selecting the three shortest psalms he remembered, and made up his mind to chant only these.

The darkness of night succeeded the twilight of evening, and with quicker voice the friar sang his psalms, cheered by the thought that his happy expedient would considerably shorten his task. His rough straw bed had been taken from his cell, to add to the sum of his discomforts ; and the friar, not having that reverence for his superior that all good brethren were supposed to have, thought while he chanted that he

was the most miserable of friars, and his superior the most tyrannical of abbots. The remembrance of the mode by which his delinquency had been discovered did not at all conduce to a loving frame of mind towards his brethren, and all these thoughts put together naturally developed themselves into a very strong wish to serve them out all round.

There had been no restrictions placed upon the mode or manner of his chanting, and so the friar, as midnight approached, when all in the abbey were hushed to repose, and the silence of night was broken only by the call of the jackdaw, or the hissing of the owl from amongst the ivy, opened his latticed window, and thrusting his head out, commenced in the most lugubrious of voices chanting his psalms.

A noise so unusual roused the watchdogs in the quadrangle; and failing to comprehend what the noise meant, they threw up their heads and howled in chorus.

When this concert was first commenced, the abbot was plunged in the enjoyment of his first sleep. Like all bachelors of a certain age, the abbot, if he missed his sleep during the night, lost his temper throughout the day; and for him to pass a restless, sleepless night was a most unhappy thing for all the inmates of the abbey. The first notes of the strange chorus caused him to turn over on his couch; their continuance roused him partially; but, betwixt sleeping and waking, they were so unintelligible as to make him fancy it was the abbey bell tolling for prayers. He rose up in his bed; and then the howling of the dogs, with

the strange bass accompaniment that proceeded from a voice he did not recognise, struck him with such horror, that his fringe of hair trembled and tried to stand upright in a circle round his head.

The abbot was not a man given to many fears; but he had one failing in this direction, which was a fixed belief that when dogs howled in the night-time, it was a sign that some member of the order was in danger. He had on sundry occasions afore-time summoned the inmates of the abbey, from a similar cause, to midnight prayers; and in a short time the whole abbey was roused by the tolling of the bell, to meet in the chapel.

On hearing the bell ring out thus suddenly in the middle of the night, Friar Goodly was so elated that he sang fifty psalms in a jubilant note; and the brethren, as they crept by his door to take part in the unexpected service, wondered at the happy change that had taken place in the friar's voice. Before they returned, Friar Goodly had finished his allotted task; and, stretched on his hard floor, was sound asleep.

During the term occupied by Goodly in his penitential exercise, he contrived to have the abbey roused very frequently, until at length his brethren, out of concern for their own rest, solicited the indulgence of the abbot towards their erring brother, and obtained some concession for him, which closed his punishment ere the full term had expired. For several succeeding months Friar Goodly observed the rules of the abbey with such diligence as to escape any serious

punishment, and the affair of psalm-singing began to fade from mind.

It was at this season that Peter Hood was slain; and Robin, the morning after his father's murder, repaired to Narrowflask Abbey, to beg the favour of Friar Goodly's services to bury his father. The request was granted, and Robin, on his return home with the friar, told him the sorrowful story of his father's death.

On reaching Speedswift, Robin besought the friar first to comfort his mother, who had scarcely spoken since his father's death. When the friar entered the great room, he found Dame Hood sitting by the body of her husband.

"God's will be suffered," the friar said, as he entered the room.

"Ay, and amen," responded the dame. Rising, she made as though she would have knelt before the friar, but staggering, would have fallen to the ground, had not Robin sprang forward and caught her in his arms.

"Mother dear, be strong in God," he exclaimed in a piteous tone, as, assisted by the friar, he raised her upright, to carry her to a stool. But her head fell upon his breast. Her heart was broken. She was dead.

This fresh calamity drove Robin nearly wild with grief. He beat his forehead with his hands, and tore his hair in the extremity of his grief; while the friar's exhortations fell unheeded on his ears.

It was the time of grief then, and consolation found

no way to his heart. The bitter stroke of death, falling so heavily and unexpectedly upon him, seemed to be trebly weighted as his heart smote him with being the cause of his father's and his mother's death.

After some hours of passionate weeping, the remembrance of all the sufferings to which they had been exposed by the unpopular Normans burned into his soul the determination to have revenge.

A day elapsed, and then the friar accompanied Robin into the forest, to choose a spot wherein to lay the bodies of his parents.

Not far from Speedswift there lived, in a poor, rude hut in the forest, a widow named Headlock, and her son, whom Dame Hood and her husband had often befriended when they were in need. Near this cottage they resolved to bury, and the widow's son lent a helping hand in digging the grave. The widow promised that so long as she lived she would preserve the spot from desecration, and assisted to build up a pile of stones, in the centre of which they planted a cross, a token to all who passed by that the spot was sacred to the dead. On their way home, Robin told the friar that he should leave Speedswift to his father's dependents, and go to Gamewell House, hinting, at the same time, his fears that the foresters had marked him as one of their next victims.

The friar had obtained leave of absence from the abbey for four days; and after having buried Robin's parents, returned home with him. They entered the house by the ladder, which they drew up after them, according to custom, and descended into the large

room, where, sitting round a great fire which the men-servants had kindled, they talked of those who were departed.

Evening was approaching, when they were startled by hearing footsteps outside the house. They listened and heard subdued voices muttering, and then, by the sound, they fancied there must be at least a score of men outside. They were only five in all in the inside, —Robin, the friar, and three male servants. Nor could it be expected that the friar should take up a weapon, so that their actual strength to resist whatever attack was intended, in reality was only four men.

In an instant Robin scattered the burning logs of fire about the ground, so that they might not distinguish from the outside the number of those within. While he was in the act of doing this, there commenced a heavy knocking on the outside. Robin set one man to watch from the lower room anything that he might discover to be going on outside, and, with the friar and the other two men, crept up into the room above.

Opening a small casement, the friar looked out, and demanded the business of him who so rudely knocked at the house of death, whereupon a shrill voice replied, "I'm the Sheriff of Nottingham, and have come in the king's name to apprehend one Robin Hood, for slaying the king's deer and beating the king's foresters."

"Truly the king's laws must be observed," replied the friar; "but God's hand is laid with grievous

weight upon this house, and the night of mourning is sacred. Come in the morning, and the youth, I warrant, will give a good account of himself."

"Nay, that can never be," screamed the sheriff; "give me and my men admittance, or we will see whether the king's command shall be obeyed or not."

"You come not in the king's name," replied the friar, "or you would not have your men in hiding; wherefore speak you of the king's law, when you come like a thief? Verily, look you to yourself; for, by my troth, the king shall know how his true subjects are murdered in his name, and oppressed grievously by his foresters."

"You lie!" exclaimed a voice that belonged to some one in hiding, but which Robin recognised as that of Gammer. "You lie," the voice repeated, "you lazy friar, and art in compact with the villainous Saxons who kill the king's deer."

"Nay, then," added the sheriff, "as you refuse us admittance, we will force it for ourselves."

"Look out for yourselves, then!" shouted Robin.

"Your blood be upon your own heads!" chimed in the friar; and, stepping back, he closed the casement.

They saw the sheriff step back about fifty yards, and heard him summon his men; when, in obedience to his call, a crowd of nearly twenty men appeared, each armed for the encounter.

A shower of arrows was discharged in the direction of the casement, which struck harmlessly. The besiegers were divided into three parties, and took up different stations, with a view to distract the attention

of the besieged as much as possible. Robin searched the ranks of the enemy with a keen and anxious eye, to discover if he could the whereabouts of Gammer, but failed to find him.

The impulsive sheriff however, less cautious than the foresters, moved about from group to group, giving orders in an excited tone of voice, and gesticulating with both hands his threats against the occupants of the house. Robin, whose sole wish was to have an encounter with the foresters, hardly anticipated an attack from such a body of men under the sheriff; and he thought he would administer a little caution to the sheriff, whom he really did not wish to harm, and so fired an arrow, which carried his cap off his head. Robin saw him clasp his hand to his head, as though for the moment he was in doubt whether his head had not gone as well, and then heard an exclamation escape from the sheriff's lips, which indicated a very fervent resolution to repay the compliment paid him with interest. Still the sheriff bustled about, and there was no sign of any intention to commence hostilities. Robin saw one group retire to the shelter of some trees, as he supposed, but in reality to obtain a large quantity of wood with which to kindle a fire and burn the house down. The wood was thrown down in a heap against a corner of the house; and Robin stood at an opening, with his bow ready, and determined to shoot the first man who should venture to attempt to fire the wood. He was not kept waiting long, when, notwithstanding the hint that had been given him, he saw the sheriff

approach with a lighted brand, with which to fire the wood-pile. He was within twenty yards of the house when Robin fired, and the sheriff fell heavily to the ground, the lighted brand falling from his hand and becoming extinguished on the grass. There was a shout of dismay amongst the sheriff's men; the four little forces retreated to the cover of the forest trees, and in a short time four of their number, without arms, approached the house, waving their hands in signal of their pacific intentions. They were allowed to remove the body of the sheriff, who had been pierced through the heart, from the spot where it lay to the cover of the trees. After some time had elapsed, those in Speedswift saw that a rude litter of some sort had been constructed, on which the body of the leader was laid, and the whole of the men marched out of sight, taking with them the old mare left in exchange by the coroner.

That so strong a body of men should have been deterred from their design by the death of one man, was so strange, that until many hours had elapsed Robin and his friends kept watch, believing that the enemy had merely retreated for a time, and would return as soon as they had conveyed the body of the sheriff to a place of safety.

Amongst the number of those with the sheriff were Gammer and Gruff, and the design the former had in beating a retreat after the sheriff's death will be developed in a subsequent chapter. They did not return to molest the few inhabitants of Speedswift; and when midnight came, Robin determined to leave

the house altogether, and escape to Gamewell. He asked each of his father's dependents in turn whether they would like to remain in the house and occupy the land; but they each refused, and it was at length resolved that they should all repair to Gamewell, leaving the friar to return to Narrowflask Abbey.

There was no property in the house that Robin cared to preserve, and they resolved to burn the house down when they left, so as to give their enemies no triumph should they return. Dry logs of wood were piled up against the four corners of the house on the inside, and Robin himself, after the others had let themselves quietly down, and stolen into the forest, set fire to these, and then followed his friends.

They all journeyed in company for several miles, taking a wide circuit to evade pursuit if their escape should chance to be discovered. They saw, from the lurid appearance of the heavens, when they had advanced to some distance in the forest, that the fire had taken effect; and Robin strode silently on, his heart heavy as he thought of the sorrows of the past, and the dark fate that seemed to loom before him. They passed within sight of the walls of the old abbey, and when they left, Friar Goodly, as he bestowed his blessing at parting on his companions, said he hoped their next meeting would be a merry one. Robin, however, was in no hopeful mood; the death of his parents, and the disaster of the night,—for as such he regarded the death of the sheriff, although he felt that it was richly deserved,—made

him very low ; and the fear that, through the wild freak they played upon Gammer and Gruff, there might be in store for Marian and Roger Gamewell still worse sorrows, oppressed his heart.

After parting from the friar, they hastened on to Gamewell, which they reached in the early gray of morning ; and, after carefully reconnoitring the ground to discover whether the foresters were about, they sallied up to the moat and roused the inmates. Their arrival was hailed with much joy by all at Gamewell ; but the story of what had befallen them made Roger Gamewell very uneasy. They were, however, in a very good state to resist an attack ; and in the meantime Roger despatched a messenger to Baron de Allsole, to acquaint him with what was taking place, and urging upon him the fulfilment of his promise of assistance in case of an attack being made by the foresters.





CHAPTER V.

Gammer elected Sheriff of Nottingham—His cruel treatment of the Saxons—Robin visits Nottingham—The Shooting Match at Mansfield—Robin and Will slay four Foresters.

THE sheriff's attacking party, on recovering the body of their leader, held a consultation as to what they should do ; some of the boldest advised that they should wait until the darkness of night had set in, and that then they should set the house on fire, and shoot each one as he was forced out by the flames. Others knew from experience that a Saxon's shaft was a very unpleasant thing to encounter, and were afraid lest by some sudden sally more of their number might be slain.

Gammer, with a number of his men, including Gruff, had really formed a portion of the attacking party ; the honour of leading the whole, however, had been claimed by and allowed to the impetuous sheriff, who had been sacrificed to his own indiscretion. The command of the party, after the sheriff's death, naturally devolved upon Gammer, and he

ultimately decided that they should return to Nottingham.

Late in the night they arrived before its walls, and were admitted. The sheriff was an important functionary in the town, and his duties were of a most arduous and varying character. The town of Nottingham was divided at this time into two districts,—one called the Saxon, and the other the Norman quarter,—and one of the most difficult duties the sheriff had to perform was to maintain peace between the inhabitants of the two quarters.

Each quarter in turn elected the sheriff, who was to regulate the affairs of both parties. The sheriff now dead was a Saxon, and one who had ruled his own party so rigorously as to earn for him the nickname of Judas. When the tidings of his death was spread, there was very little sympathy felt for him anywhere; and in the Norman quarter of the town there was much rejoicing at the prospect of having one of their own number to rule. Though the office was one of many privileges, yet it was one of much danger, and sometimes considerable difficulty was experienced in finding a suitable person who was willing to assume its functions. In this instance, however, it was not so; and it was soon noised about in the Norman quarter that Gammer, the king's head-forester for the Nottingham district, would be chosen sheriff, and would willingly accept the responsibilities. For Gammer had envied Sheriff Judas the honourable position, and his insatiable avarice pictured the post as one that would yield him boundless wealth. Hav-

ing the charge of the forest, he had drawn largely from its resources for the supply of the leading Norman families. In this way he had made such progress in their affection as to render his election sure. Nor had his attentions been confined to the inhabitants of the Norman quarter entirely, but he was regarded with favour by the governor of the castle; and the drawbridge was never lowered with such alacrity as in obedience to the summons of some of Gammer's men loaded with a present of game for the governor and the soldiers.

The mention of Gammer's name as a candidate was well received by the inhabitants, and he was declared duly elected after the usual preliminaries which were customary on such occasions.

Gammer celebrated his election by giving a grand feast to the people, on which occasion a fat buck was roasted whole in the market-place; and everybody cut and came again as often as they liked.

The Saxons, who had never reason to look with respect on their late sheriff, regarded with no little fear the election of Gammer as his successor. The first act of Gammer's new position was to order the burial of Sheriff Shrimp at the sole expense of the Saxon quarter of the town. The cost of the funeral was levied by an indiscriminate seizure of goods from the houses and shops of the richest Saxon traders, which were sold by Gammer at the Norman cross. This proceeding gave intense satisfaction to the Normans, while the Saxons regarded it with considerable alarm, as indicative of an unfriendly spirit.

A suitable residence was selected by the new sheriff, in the heart of the Norman quarter; and he flattered himself into the belief that the town had obtained the services of a pattern sheriff. Amongst the duties of this personage were the apprehension and punishment of a certain class of offenders against the king's laws, and regulations for the good government of the town. He had the custody of the gates, and the choice of the watchmen and soldiers for the towers. He had to summon the city to bear arms in case of need on the part of the king, and was expected to render efficient aid to the governor of the castle on all occasions when his services might be required. In past years this arrangement had caused considerable difficulty between the inhabitants of the town and the governor of the castle, through the divided allegiance of the two—the town siding with one party in the state, and the castle with the other. The town then punished the castle by withholding supplies, and the latter retaliated by sallying into the town and setting part of it on fire, or seizing a number of the principal townspeople, whom they held as hostages until the needed supplies were forwarded. The sheriff also exercised summary jurisdiction over strangers and wanderers who passed through the town, and levied a certain amount of toll at all the great fairs and markets which were held. An additional task had recently been added to the office of sheriff, which was to do honour to the king's justices, who, during the reign of Henry II., for the first time commenced a system of itineracy throughout the

kingdom for the settlement of the more important class of offences, and the adjustment of disputes which were continually arising between the barons.

The various engagements of his new office fully occupied the whole of Gammer's time. He was appointed sheriff late in the autumn of 1178, and during the following winter he found no time to carry out those plans which he had designed for the punishment of Robin Hood and the Gamewells.

The winter was an unusually hard one, and very little business was transacted.

It was customary for the poor people to hoard up stores of food to last them through the winter months, when there was little work of any kind to be found. If these small hoards failed before the frosts and snows departed, then there were the religious houses, where summer's plenty always reigned, and from their abundance the wants of the lowest classes were amply supplied. The winter lasted longer than usual this year, and crowds of hungry poor were daily to be met with within the precincts of the abbeys and monasteries. One kind of return, which was exacted from able-bodied men amongst the number of the applicants, was to cut timber for the use of the religious house that had befriended them; and this was considered the full value of the relief administered. Gammer ordered that no Norman should be so employed for the future; and while the poor of both quarters were fed from the same source, the Saxons only were expected to provide timber. When the monks complained that they did not get a sufficient

quantity of wood to supply their wants by this arrangement, the sheriff ordered that the value of each day's relief should be tendered at the abbey before the relief itself was obtained. Thus the poor Saxons were kept working all day in the forest hewing timber for themselves and the Normans; and if the monks had not treated them with more consideration than the sheriff did, they would certainly have starved. At the same time, this regulation was sowing seeds of animosity in the hearts of the Saxons, which were destined to bring forth bitter fruit in after-years.

Many days elapsed, after Robin reached Gamewell, before they heard of the appointment of Gammer to the shrievalty of Nottingham, in place of Sheriff Shrimp, shot at the attack on Speedswift. During these days the time of all the inmates was fully occupied in making preparation for defence. When day after day went by, and still no foresters came, Roger determined to send one of his men into Nottingham to glean some news. This was just a task that Robin loved, and he volunteered to go; but Roger would not hear of it, pointing out that the foresters had now such a thorough description of his person, that he would be sure to be taken and hung at once. Marian added her entreaties to those of Roger and Will Gamewell, and ultimately Robin gave way.

The son of the old widow Headlock had been residing at Gamewell for some few days; a young man, who, by his skill in beating his opponents at quarterstaff, had earned the title of Scathelock; and he volunteered

to undertake the proposed journey to Nottingham. His offer was accepted ; and, disguised in the garb of a beggar, he sallied forth.

After two days' absence he returned, and told to the astonished household the news of Gammer's elevation to the post of sheriff. The man had heard of the seizure of the Saxons' goods for the defrayal of the late sheriff's funeral, and had seen sufficient to make him conclude that there were hard times in store for the poor Saxon inhabitants of Nottingham.

During the long winter months that followed, the people at Gamewell found profitable employment, for what otherwise would have been weary days, in replenishing the stock of articles for their personal wear. Marian was an adept in spinning, and there were two women who could weave very well. There were three women in the household altogether, and with the accession of Robin and three men, they numbered eleven men and three women. Under Marian's tuition the women, who had been but indifferent spinners before, became so expert as to enable them to provide a sufficient stock for the wants of the whole household. The monotony of the daily life at Gamewell at this season of the year was varied by an occasional hunt in the forest ; but the deer were so tame that there was little real sport to be enjoyed. On these occasions, however, several members of the household went in company, for fear of an unexpected attack from the foresters.

After several months had passed, and nothing fresh had occurred to mar the even tenor of their life

Robin one morning stole unawares out of the house and repaired to Nottingham, to learn for himself the existing state of affairs.

This happened at the very time when every day the Saxons were in the habit of going into the forest to cut wood for the abbeys. Robin had never seen so many men employed before, and on soliciting alms from some of them,—to keep up his disguise as a beggar,—was told, with an ironical laugh, to go to Sheriff Gammer. “Nay,” said another, “do not add to the sorrows of a man worse off than ourselves.”

“If you want to be cast by your heels,” said he, turning to Robin, “go to the sheriff; but if you want to feed a Norman’s mouth and your own, just give us a turn with this axe at the stump of this tree, and I’ll share whatever I get with you.”

“Ay, that I will,” said Robin; “but these are bad times, when a Saxon has to work that a Norman may eat and play.”

“It is even so,” the man replied; “and I fear worse times are before us.”

Robin bent to his task with a hearty goodwill, and before the afternoon closed they had got between them a very large heap of timber ready for use. He afterwards assisted the man to drag the wood into the town, and deliver it at the abbey.

Robin was invited to lodge that night at the Saxon’s house, and the story of the sufferings to which the poor Saxons were subjected made a deep impression on his mind. On the following morning he went out into the forest again with the wood-

cutters, but, after working a short time, struck off into the forest, on his way back to Gamewell. Robin was well chidden for running away; but laughed at his friends' alarm, vowing that he was a match for twenty foresters any day, and that the Saxons in Nottingham would be the best friends that the forest rovers had ever yet found.

Roger was strangely agitated by the news of the treatment the poor Saxons were receiving in Nottingham. He said the young men might live to see better days, but that his own would be few, and full of trouble.

At length the weary season of winter was past, and the return of spring called the early flowers into new life, while the trees put forth their leaves, and began to assume the glorious garb of summer. In all the villages round about the forest the return of spring was celebrated with a festival on the 1st of May. Then it was that the scattered country people flocked into the villages, and servants and villains, or dependents, met together, and engaged in games of wrestling, racing matches, battling with quarterstaves, throwing bars or quoits, and shooting with bows and arrows. On these occasions jugglers would display their conjuring tricks, bards sing songs, and beggars ply their vocation briskly. Very often the rich barons or landowners in the neighbourhood would send contributions to the merry-making, in the shape of barrels of strong drink, and sheep, pigs, or venison, to be roasted for the delectation of the whole company. Prizes were given to the most skilful wrestler

and the best shot with the bow and arrow; and at night the whole would close with a rather rough sort of dance. In the village of Mansfield, Baron de Allsole had offered a handsome beît for the best shot, and thither Robin and Will determined to go to try their skill with those they might chance to meet. Roger was not willing that they should go, but they promised faithfully that they would keep clear of the foresters, and would only give a blow in return for one. So he consented. Marian, who had listened to the conversation, fearing they would both meet with the foresters and be beaten by them before they returned, made Robin promise he would take his horn beneath his doublet, and sound a sharp note on it for assistance. Robin and Will started forth in the disguise of labourers.

The village was crowded with people, all busying themselves in the different games. A large butt was set up, and marks affixed for the archers. While the ground was being measured, a Norman knight was engaged to act as judge. In all, there were twenty-four men who stepped forward to shoot for the prize, which the judge buckled round his own waist till the close of the contest. Robin and Will were among the number of those who were to shoot. It was declared that an arrow each should be shot, and the best amongst the whole should then shoot a second arrow, and so on until the two best shots were finally selected to contest for the prize. A small black ring was painted on the butt, and two large outer ones. In the first round all outside the third ring were

declared off; in the third all had to lodge an arrow within the middle ring, or they were disqualified.

All the arrangements having at length been concluded, the shooting commenced. A great crowd gathered round the archers, and for a time the Saxon and Norman bards and the quaint jugglers were without audiences, and laid aside their vocation until the contest was concluded. In another part of the village other contests were going on, such as wrestling and throwing weights, or leaping; but archery was by far the most popular of all. The competitors had already fired two rounds each, when the harmony that had up to that time prevailed was rudely broken by a number of foresters, who came up to the spot, accompanied by four packhorses laden with game, which they were going to take as presents to the castle of Nottingham, to the religious houses in the town, and to the sheriff.

Seeing the archers, they noisily insisted on being allowed to take part in the contest. The foresters prided themselves on their superiority with the bow, but were, in reality, very inferior to the ordinary Saxon.

There was at once a tumult. The Normans who had been competing, and especially those who were already out of the contest, insisted that the strangers should be permitted to shoot, while those who were in the contest as strongly objected to such an unfair proceeding. On counting them, there were found to be fourteen foresters, and as, if they had all shot, the contest would have been delayed too long to suit

their purpose, they agreed, on the suggestion of the judge, to nominate six of their number who might compete. This was done; and the remainder unloaded the horses and then broached some ale-casks which were to have been divided equally amongst the people in the afternoon, and in huge horns filled with the liquor, drank to their comrades' success.

At the first round, five of the foresters were disqualified, the people hailing with loud shouts their discomfiture. The prize now lay between the skill of the only four who had not been disqualified. Of these, one was a strange youth unknown to any present, a second was one of the foresters, and the remaining two were Robin and Will. These four had to shoot within the inner circle. Amid shouts from the people the forester and Will fell back, having missed; and the prize lay between Robin and the youth.

The defeated forester, who had been shooting well up to the last, on stepping back was surrounded by his companions, who, excited by the drink they had been taking, were gesticulating furiously, and, with many angry expressions, appeared to be devising mischief.

Robin and the youth having been each allowed a little rest, now stepped forward to shoot for the last time. There was a little delay before the first arrow was fired, because Robin wanted the youth to shoot first, and signified his wish by a wave of his hand, being separated from each other. The youth, however, resolutely refused, and Robin, accordingly,

planted one foot firmly on the ground a little in advance of the other, took aim, and then suddenly let fly his arrow, striking the very centre of the target.

Men and women stretched their heads forward in silence as the arrow flew, but when it struck the target, a loud shout of approval burst from their lips. Silence was again restored while the youth took his aim. Close observers noticed a little trembling in his limbs, and when he shot, the arrow struck outside the centre.

There was a rush made by the people to where the victor stood, and in a moment the youth, whom Robin called for loudly, was lost in the crowd and disappeared. Robin was raised on the shoulders of a sturdy Saxon, and, with loud shouts, was borne to where the judge sat, where he was solemnly invested with the prize-belt, affixed to which was a quiver full of arrows. Here other sturdy Saxons framed a rough sort of seat, on which Robin was placed, and then borne on men's shoulders through the village towards the cross.

The foresters, however, threw themselves in the way of the jubilant crowd; and when they were in consequence jostled, laid about them with stout oak staves, which had been bound together on the horses' backs, and many heavy blows were inflicted by them. In the crush that ensued, Robin was thrown down, and before he could get upon his legs, the forester who had nearly won the prize took it forcibly from his waist. Others crowded round, and kicked and struck Robin as he lay on the ground. A general

fight ensued, in the course of which, however, the foresters, by keeping together and using their quarterstaves, appeared to come off victorious. Hoisting their champion, with the prize-belt round his waist, on to the back of one of the horses, all of which they had hastily reloaded, they started off through the village, cheering lustily as they went.

In the course of the fight, Robin, who was in great danger, caught sight of Will, who stood up manfully against great odds; and, to his astonishment, he also gained a glimpse of the youth who had so nearly carried off the prize which Robin had won, doing battle on his behalf. On recovering somewhat from the beating he had received, Robin and Will started off quietly, as if to return home, firmly declining the invitation of the people who crowded round them, and who would have had them remain to the afternoon's feast. Leaving the village, they struck off into the forest; then, by a short cut, doubled round the village, with the determination to intercept the foresters before they could reach Nottingham. This they did, and came upon them when they were about three miles from the town. They hid themselves at a short distance from the road along which the foresters were travelling. From their concealment they could hear the foresters talking over the morning's sport, as they termed it, while they exulted in their prowess, and laughed at the pleasure the story would give Sheriff Gammer when they told him. Robin could see the man who had stolen the belt walking a few yards apart, and in advance of the others, as though

he was the leader of the party ; and while he and Will were discussing how they should act, they were astonished to hear the whiz of an arrow, and the next moment to see the man fall to the ground. This strange occurrence surprised Robin and Will almost as much as it did the foresters, and, taking advantage of the alarm it excited amongst the men, Robin and Will shot together into their midst as they stood in a group, while a third arrow flew from the same quarter whence the first proceeded. The foresters appeared to be in a great state of consternation at this unexpected attack. The group opened as the arrows flew amongst them, and Robin saw that another besides the leader now lay on the ground, while two others appeared to be wounded. A couple of the horses stood still in the roadway, while the other couple galloped off in the direction of Nottingham. Robin now emerged from the screen behind which he had shot, followed by Will, and made towards the men, who, on recognising him, scampered off into the forest. The man who wore the prize about his waist, and who was wounded, hastily pulled off the belt, flung it on the ground, and made off with his comrades. Another man, who had been wounded, also ran off, with an arrow sticking in his right arm. They were, however, not so fleet as to escape altogether, and two more arrows brought down each their man.

On nearing the spot where the other two men lay, they saw the youth who had proved in the morning Robin's stoutest opponent. He stood still until

Robin and Will came up, but did not speak to them. Robin held out his hand to grasp that of the stranger, when, suddenly pausing, in the greatest amazement, he exclaimed, "Marian!"

Will gazed into her face speechless, and seemed to be more astonished than his companion.

"Robin," Marian said in a serious voice, "I knew ere you started you would be beaten by the foresters, and the fear of meeting with them prevented my accepting your invitation to witness the shooting match, which I must have done in my own proper person; but I was not willing that you should either carry off all the honour, or incur all the risk, by yourself, so I stole after you in this disguise. But," she added, "I did not expect to have had the opportunity of partially avenging my father's death to-day, as I have done by wounding two of these foresters."

Robin declared that Marian had saved his life at the fight in the village, by drawing off some of his assailants, and promised in future that she should share his dangers, if she very much wished.

Will busied himself in examining the faces of the four dead men, and recognised them as amongst those who had attacked Gamewell when Ivy Harper was shot. Robin examined all the quivers that the men wore, taking out an arrow from each; but he did not find one that corresponded with the spliced arrow he carried in his quiver.

"These men," said Will, "shall be left here as your father was left in the forest, Robin, when he was so cruelly murdered; and let those that care for them

fetch them away. They've paid this day a just debt for many a poor Saxon that they or their fellows have slain."

There were two horses still standing with their load of venison in the roadway, and these they determined to take back with them to Gamewell. They threw off the loads from their backs, and Marian and Robin mounted one, while Will appropriated the other. The dead foresters were left where they fell, and the only article carried away was the belt that belonged to Robin. One of the foresters carried a large sum of money in a bag at his waist, but they scorned to take it from him.

Leaving the ground where the dead lay, they put their horses into a gentle canter, and rode back to Gamewell. The sound of horses frightened some of the household at first, and the appearance of the riders seemed to perplex Roger extremely.

He heard the recital of their day's adventures in silence, and shook his head gravely.

"It is well," he said, when the stories of the three were ended, "that you are all returned alive and sound to Gamewell; but you bring me news that bids me prepare for a journey longer than I have ever yet taken—a journey from which I return no more."

Marian tried all she could to cheer her adopted father, and chided him for his fears; but nothing could uproot the presentiment that oppressed his spirit.



CHAPTER VI.

The Sheriff's Expedition in Search of the Rebels—The Gamewell Fight—Night Attacks upon the Besiegers—The last Fight—Destruction of Gamewell—Death of Roger Gamewell—Arrival of Robin and his Party at the Greenwood Glade.



THE surviving foresters made the best of their way as rapidly as possible to Nottingham, where their appearance excited quite a commotion, and attracted a large crowd, amongst whom the most extravagant rumours began to circulate about some terrible and bloody attack upon the foresters by an armed band that was then marching to attack the town. The foresters were led to the residence of the Sheriff Gammer, to whom they told a tale which did not lack the element of exaggeration, since they represented that they had been intercepted and robbed in the forest by a band numbering more than a hundred men. The sheriff ordered the gates of Nottingham to be instantly closed, and mounted double guards on the walls. As a further preservative of public peace, he ordered that

twelve of the oldest and most revered Saxons in Nottingham should be seized and lodged in the common jail as hostages for the safety of the town. Information was sent to the governor of the castle, who laughed at the messenger as he told him that there was an army of Saxons marching on Nottingham with a view to seize the castle. Bonfires were lighted in the open parts of the town, and many of the inhabitants armed themselves with all sorts of weapons to defend the place against the anticipated foe. During the whole night watch was kept, but there was no sign of the approach of a hostile foe.

When the morning came, the sheriff ordered a band of men to prepare to go into the forest for the purpose of reconnoitring. A reinforcement was solicited from the castle, but curtly refused by the governor, who recommended the sheriff to fight his own enemies with his own people. The sheriff accordingly made a levy upon the Norman quarter of the town, and succeeded in getting up a band between eighty and ninety in number. He ordered them to the forest, to make what discovery they could of the position and strength of the enemy. The foresters undertook to lead the band to the spot where their comrades had fallen. An expedition of this sort had not left Nottingham for several years, and the walls were crowded with people to see them start. After leaving the town, the force divided, and forty men were despatched to the neighbourhood of Mansfield to learn what they could there.

The rest of the party marched along the high-

road until they arrived at the spot where, on the previous day, the rangers had succumbed to Robin, Marian, and Will. There they found the dead bodies of the foresters, each pierced with a single arrow. The bodies were examined, and found not to have been touched with a view to robbery; and on the person of one there was still the bag of gold which the band knew he carried. The foresters had kept secret the real object of the attack made upon them, and their disgraceful conduct at the village festivities. On their way to the spot, the foresters that accompanied this party told marvellous stories of the numbers of the foe they had encountered; how that the Saxons had suddenly appeared in the roadway before them, and demanded that the laden horses should be given up to them, with all the arms they carried; how that the foresters had resisted and fought for several hours, and ultimately escaped with two of their horses, leaving their comrades dead upon the field. The foresters were confident that they had slain three of the enemy for every one of their number dead. But they were sorely puzzled, on the ground being examined, to account for there being no marks of bodies having lain there, except those discovered. Litters were constructed with branches of trees, on which the bodies were placed, and the band made the best of their way back to Nottingham. On their return, the bodies were laid out in St Michael's Church to await burial.

Meanwhile, the other division, after a good long march, arrived in the neighbourhood of Mansfield. By

the advice of their guides they then separated, and a few entered the village, in twos and threes, and from opposite quarters. This was accomplished in such a way as not even to rouse the attention of the inhabitants, who, like all village populations, 'were quickly out into the roads to look upon the most trivial variation from their quiet life. Some of the leaders went up to a large house in the centre of the village to make inquiries about the supposed rebels; but, in answer to the question, were told that they had had no rebels since the foresters broke the people's heads because they were beaten at the archery.

By this time the others arrived, and the presence of so many strangers attracted the notice of the people, and they came out of their houses to find out the cause of such an influx. Nor were the Normans slow to enter into conversation with the people about the engagement in the forest, the slaying of the foresters, and the anticipated attack upon Nottingham. The day was hot, the men had had a long march, were tired and hungry, and these things had put the would-be warriors in anything but an amiable temper.

The people listened with open mouths to the account of the battle, and expressed themselves uncommonly pleased with its result, vowing that the whole of the rangers deserved to be hung for their brutal conduct on May-day.

The origin of the foresters' misfortunes thus came out; and the party destined for attack looked exceedingly foolish and annoyed at the false position in which they were placed. Their guides—some of the

identical foresters—were soundly rated for their lying tales, which had caused so much unnecessary labour. After having refreshed themselves, the whole company started on their return to Nottingham, and, having partly regained their temper, lightened the homeward journey by laughing at, and ridiculing most unmercifully, the crest-fallen heroes.

When the sheriff was informed of the true state of the case, he upbraided the foresters with having occasioned him so much trouble. Still four of their number had been slain, though the sheriff surmised that the assailants were but few.

Ultimately the men confessed that they had seen but three in the forest; and gave such descriptions of them and their skill in shooting, as convinced the sheriff that their disguise was assumed, and that they could be none other than Robin Hood and his two companions. He accordingly determined to make up two parties that should attack both Speedswift and Gamewell at the same time, and destroy both the houses and their inmates. He ordered that the Saxon hostages should be released; and withdrew a part of the guards from the walls.

The story of the expedition and its result speedily circulated throughout Nottingham, and was a source of much merriment to all except those directly concerned. After a few days had elapsed, the sheriff announced his intentions respecting Speedswift and Gamewell; and in order to attract a sufficient number to carry out his project, he promised to pay a certain amount per head for every Saxon captured in the two houses.

This had the desired effect, and a sufficient number soon offered their services.

The sheriff's movements, however, became known in the Saxon quarter of the town ; and intelligence of what was about to take place was conveyed to Gamewell by a friendly Saxon, who intended also to have gone on to warn the inhabitants of Speedswift, but hearing of the destruction of the house, volunteered to remain at Gamewell and assist in defending the place. His offer was gladly accepted ; and again preparations were made for a vigorous defence. There were at this time in Gamewell twenty-one persons in all. Of this number four were women ; Robin brought three men with him after burning Speedswift, the Nottingham Saxon made the ninth, and of the remainder, ten were dependents belonging to Roger Gamewell. They had sufficient food in the house to serve them for a long time, much longer than the visit of any attacking force would be likely to last.

The morning after they received the intelligence of the contemplated attack, their numbers were increased one more by the unexpected arrival of Friar Goodly. It had been his lot to be present on two occasions when fighting had been going forward ; and this time he had dropped in accidentally, just to make inquiry about the health of the family. Hearing from them of the anticipated fight, he determined to remain, to give, he said, what assistance he could. Will laughed at the idea, but was gravely rebuked by the friar, who urged that, although by his creed he could not handle carnal weapons, his spiritual endowments

might prove consolatory in a certain trying hour. Although this arrival added another mouth to be fed, (not that this, as it happened, was a matter of any moment,) without imparting strength to the defence, all rejoiced in the presence of the friar, whose social qualities were of such a nature as to make him a welcome guest in every Saxon household.

The preparations in Nottingham having been completed, the sheriff marched out with a band of a hundred men to reduce the two obnoxious strongholds of the Saxons. A change now took place in Gammer's tactics, and instead of assailing the two houses simultaneously, he decided on sending Gruff with half the men to demolish Speedswift, and watch Gamewell himself with the other half till Gruff's return.

Gruff was by no means clear as to the best mode of attacking Speedswift; but made up his mind on the way thither to try first what promises would accomplish. His surprise, however, was very great when, on arriving at the spot, he found nothing remaining but a few charred stumps. He was not at all disappointed at this, because his recollection of the encounter with Will and Robin was still vivid. On returning to the sheriff, and acquainting him with what they had discovered, the sheriff resolved to postpone his attack upon Gamewell until morning; and the night was spent in boisterous revelling, in anticipation of the prize they were about to secure.

In accordance with the usual rule observed on such occasions, the sheriff on the following morning presented himself with signs of truce before the house,

and, calling upon Roger Gamewell, who shewed himself at the upper casement, related the nature of his visit, and demanded immediate admittance. This was unhesitatingly refused. He then required the surrender of Will Gamewell and Robin Hood, that they might be tried by the king's justice at Nottingham for shooting four of the king's foresters.

To which Roger replied, that they had not slain the king's foresters, but four thieves, who had robbed and beaten them; and that they meant to defend themselves from all wolves in sheep's clothing.

Robin, thrusting his head out of the casement, challenged the sheriff to a game at quarterstaff; while Will bade the sheriff take care that he didn't cut another thong to bind his own hands. The sheriff was observed to be unusually fidgety during his parley with the besieged, as though he had had good reason for fearing so close a conjunction with the house; but when Robin presented his bow through the casement, and made as though he would shoot, the sheriff turned round and fairly scampered off amongst the trees, followed by his escort, in a most hasty and undignified manner, and amid uproarious laughter from those who had caused his retreat.

The reduction of the place was considered a matter of no mean importance, requiring a considerable amount of patience. Within, every corner was well guarded, and every loophole occupied by an archer. There were immense stones heaped up against the gate that led from the moat into the place, and piles of stones were also laid on the floor of the upper

apartment, to hurl upon the heads of any of the more bold assailants who should be hardy enough to cross the moat on that side, and attempt to climb the embankment. This was not anticipated, however, as the water in the moat was so deep that only a good swimmer would have ventured into it, and during the day he would have afforded such a mark for an arrow, as would be certain to result in his death.

Without, there was considerable excitement, as the men stood for a time looking at the place they had undertaken to capture and destroy.

On seeing their leader running back to them after the parley, they hid themselves behind the trees, scarce divining the cause of so sudden and hasty a return. Some of the older hands, nevertheless, could not refrain from laughing heartily at the comical expression of terror which overspread their leader's face. On getting well under cover of a tree, he called out in a loud tone for his men to shoot, which they did, throwing nearly two score of arrows in the direction of the casement. But the besieged were too sharp for them, and the arrows fell harmlessly. The shooting on the part of the besieged was, however, not so ineffective; for if by chance an arm or a leg was exposed for a moment, an arrow would be sure to strike the unfortunate limb. In this way so many were wounded the first day of the attack, that the sheriff thought it advisable to send a messenger to Nottingham to obtain reinforcements.

The skill of their adversaries made the besiegers uncommonly wary; and it was soon evident that other

measures besides watching by day, and firing an occasional arrow, would have to be resorted to before the place could be reduced.

At night the besiegers drew themselves off into the forest, and returned at daybreak. This continued until the arrival of recruits, to the number of fifty. It was then determined that they should remain night and day before the house. They had anticipated an easy capture, so that the courage of the besiegers was considerably damped in the outset, by the resistance they met with.

They made up their minds to be as comfortable, under the circumstances, as possible, and, at night, lighted a number of fires amongst the trees, round which they sat, enlivening the tedium of the watch by songs.

The first and second night Roger gave orders that his friends should watch the enemy well, but on no account fire an arrow at them, believing that, if they did not molest them, on a subsequent night the besiegers would become careless of keeping under cover, and that they might then be able to create some havoc amongst them. Roger's advice was followed for three nights; but on the fourth night there were so many tempting marks presented, that he caused the whole of his band to let fly simultaneously at several groups round the fires. They did great execution, no fewer than thirteen being seriously wounded by the arrows. Soon afterwards, the fires were all extinguished, and on the succeeding nights they were not rekindled. Thus was one of Roger's wishes ful-

filled. Another wish was that the men would be associated together more in the night-time after this, which turned out to be the case. He had not ventured to entertain the thought of a sally, because the fires lighted up a considerable space of ground, which would have discovered any attempt to surprise them that he might have planned. Watching day by day through the loopholes was wearying work, and although the besieged threw away no chance that presented itself, yet the odds were too great to enable them to lessen very perceptibly the number of their opponents. It was therefore resolved that they should try what a night attack would effect. Roger had a sufficient number of swords to furnish every man with one, but it was determined that no more than eight should venture out the first night.

A cloudy night was desired, and the seventh proved favourable to their design. The watchers of the attacking party were at such a distance from the house as not to be able to discern what might be going on at the moat; and certainly never entertained any idea of the besieged making a sortie.

The gate was carefully opened, and the men one after the other dropped silently into the moat, and swam across. They then crept along the ground until they came within the precincts of the forest, and taking a long turn, came upon the foe in such a way as to place them between themselves and the house. There were no watchmen on the inner side of the forest, so that the eight were enabled to get right into the midst of them before they found out that

their supposed security had been invaded. The sleepers started up from their grassy couches in terror, only to receive flesh-wounds from swords wielded by unknown arms. Amidst the consternation such an attack produced, many a severe wound was inflicted, which incapacitated a large number from taking further part in the siege. The Normans, panic-stricken, and not discriminating between friend and foe, struck out wildly with their fists, and heavy blows were inflicted by friend upon friend in the confusion that prevailed. The moment Roger caught the sound of the tumult, he lighted an immense pile of wood, as had been previously arranged, in the centre of the grass plot, to serve as a beacon for the brave little band. There was no resistance, however, offered to their passage; and save a few rough tumbles over the sleeping or wounded bodies of the foe, they met with no serious hindrance. Through the very centre of the force they passed, dealing blows on every hand; then out into the open space, and away to the moat, before anything like a combined opposition could be presented to their progress. One after the other they dropped into the water, and swam or struggled through, and were drawn up, well-nigh exhausted, into the stronghold. All on the bank crossed safely, no pursuit being yet organised; and the gate was slung to and barricaded again. Then they discovered, to their great regret, that one of their number was missing; and, on inquiry, it turned out to be the very man who had brought them the intelligence from Nottingham.

Robin proposed that they should at once make a second dash into the midst of the enemy ; but Roger would not hear of such a rash proceeding.

From the shouts and tumult going on amongst the foe, it was evident that they had secured the prisoner, that all their number were now fully roused, and that, had Robin's proposal been adopted, it would assuredly have resulted in a serious loss to them.

When morning dawned there was an unusual bustle amongst the besiegers ; and when the sun was fully up, it was seen, through the loopholes in the wall, that the Normans had fashioned a halter, which hung down over a branch of a tree. There could be no doubt of their intention ; they were going to hang the unfortunate prisoner.

At length the poor fellow was brought out by two of the foresters, while a third was seen to ascend the tree for the purpose of adjusting the thong for the execution. While he was doing this, the two who held the prisoner placed him against the tree, and prepared to bind his arms ; the others stood in a half circle behind, so that the inhabitants of Gamewell might have a full view of what was going forward. They, however, had calculated without their host, and the hangman on the tree offering a fair aim for a marksman, Robin drew an arrow and discharged it at him. The arrow sped quickly home, and lodged in the side of the man, who was seen to fall heavily on to the heads of the men that were preparing to bind their prisoner. There was a scuffle for a moment on the ground, and the next the Saxon was seen to

spring to his legs and run towards Gamewell. The besiegers were on the alert, and started in pursuit; but a shower of well-aimed arrows drove them behind the trees again, and the Saxon, panting from his race, leaped into the moat, and clung to the gate. In a few moments this was opened, and the poor fellow dragged inside.

There was great exultation at this feat in Gamewell, and manifest annoyance exhibited by those outside. The would-be hangman, between the wound and the fall, was killed, and his assistants escaped with broken heads only.

The escaped captive complained bitterly of the treatment he had received, and told them that nearly twenty men were wounded in the assault.

After several days, a second and more important night-attack was planned, under cover of which it was resolved to desert Gamewell, and fly into the forest. It was determined that they should take with them all their available force except two men and the friar, whom they left to fire the house, and then conduct the women into the forest when they heard the fighting commence,—Marian to act as guide. Wood was piled in readiness in various corners, and everything arranged for the second and final sortie, which Robin was to conduct.

The two horses that Robin and Will had brought back with them after the attack upon the foresters, were conveyed across the moat. To each a rider had been appointed, who was to bear a torch, while a second man was to hold on to the saddle, being armed

with a sword for their mutual defence. The others then crossed, Robin, closely followed by Will and Roger, leading the way. They hid themselves in the grass until the horsemen with the torches should have reached the foe. They had not long to wait. The light of the torches soon roused the Normans, who seized their weapons to defend themselves. The horsemen shouted as they waved their torches in the air; and, galloping into the midst of the foe, the footmen dealt deadly blows, while the horses, plunging about, scattered the men in all directions.

At this moment Robin and his band dashed in from the opposite side. They bore with irresistible fury down upon the enemy wherever they were most thronged, and cut their way through. Robin, Will, and Roger, who were in advance, left easy work for those who followed them. In the height of this, flames were observed to shoot upwards from Gamewell, which intimated to Robin and his friends that the house had been deserted, and that Marian and the rest were then in the forest, on their way to the Greenwood Glade. The Normans, though they outnumbered the Saxons nearly sixfold, were panic-stricken. The glare of the torches, the attack of the swordsmen, and the fire at Gamewell, all conspired to produce consternation in their midst, and they fled precipitately, leaving many of their number dead upon the ground.

When Robin saw there was no fear of their being followed, he gave orders to make for the forest. The horsemen immediately extinguished their torches, and

the whole party struck into the heart of the forest. Then it was that Roger complained of being hurt. The old man had been wounded very grievously in the beginning of the contest by a spear, and had been bleeding profusely. Now when the excitement was over, he fell exhausted on the ground. A halt was ordered, while the old man's wound was dressed ; but all their skill was unavailing. He had fallen in a state of insensibility from loss of blood ; and the only signs of consciousness that he gave was the waving of his right hand, as though he was triumphing in their victory. He then expired. There was no time for useless mourning. The body was lifted upon one of the horses, and the party hurried on into the forest still further ; and it was not till after a march of several hours, when the sun had risen high up in the heavens, that another halt was made.

A shallow grave was dug, in which the old man was laid, amid the universal grief of the party. They piled up a small heap of stones at the foot of a tree that stood near the grave, and then pursued their way with heavy hearts.

Robin had no difficulty in leading his friends to the appointed rendezvous, where they found Marian and all her companions, excepting the friar, who, having accompanied them into the forest several miles, had returned to his abbey. The news of the death of Will's father cast a deep gloom over the whole party, that their late triumph was wholly unable to dispel.



CHAPTER VII.

The Forest-Home of the Rovers—Robin chosen Leader—Alan discovered in the Forest—A Love Story and Adventure—Robin ducks the one-eyed Porter.

THE expedition to Gamewell, and the object it had in view, were matters of public notoriety in Nottingham, and any intelligence was looked for with much anxiety. The prolonged absence of the sheriff gave great uneasiness to the leaders in the Norman quarter; while amongst the Saxons, stories of the reverses they met with were circulated freely. The name of Robin Hood began to acquire power amongst the Saxons, and he was mentioned as the great hope of the oppressed.

Robin and Will had made no secret of their treatment of Gammer and Gruff, in Sherwood; the story was told in Mansfield, and quickly spread, with sundry exaggerations, to Nottingham.

Robin's success at the archery meeting also soon reached the town, by the very party sent to oppose the fictitious army; and there was still more rejoicing

amongst the Saxons, who made no secret of their joy. When the sheriff put a price upon Robin's head, alleging that he had killed the four foresters, there was not a Saxon in all Nottingham who would not have risen to his rescue had he been brought to the town.

Finally, there came facts about the siege of Game-well, stories of the reverses suffered, accounts of the sufferings inflicted, told by the wounded people themselves as they returned to the town, all which invested this affair with an importance that could only have been equalled by the siege of a large town.

After the final affray on the morning when Game-well was burned, the sheriff determined to return to Nottingham, in preference to engaging in a pursuit. He wanted to recruit the numbers of his men before hazarding a meeting with Robin in his forest-home. Besides, the number of his wounded was so great, that he did not feel justified in encountering a band very much inferior in number, but fighting for liberty. They, therefore, slowly commenced their return to Nottingham.

The appearance of the men could not have been more dispiriting. Worn out by their time of inactivity and hardships, they grumbled terribly; and as they had failed in their enterprise, they very plainly expressed their determination never to be led into such a wild chase again. Such of the wounded as could walk were obliged to do so; but they hobbled along with long faces, as they thought of the wounds they had got for their pains. There were many who were

so grievously hurt as not to be able to walk, and for them rude litters had been constructed, and the able-bodied took their turn in carrying them. This made the journey a very tedious one, and the sheriff was afraid of allowing a division of his forces, for fear of being surprised by Robin and his party. When they had come within a few miles of Nottingham, the whole party halted, while a messenger was sent forward to bring a number of carts for the transport of the wounded.

There happened to be a fair going forward at the time, so some of the sheriff's men seized the requisite number of carts, and compelled the owners to go out and bring in the sheriff and his party.

The news of their near approach was quickly spread in the town. The walls and streets were crowded with Saxons and Normans to see the fighting men, and shouts of derisive laughter from Saxon throats so incensed the Normans, that a tumult ensued, which was with difficulty suppressed.

The same day, Robin and his friends were holding a council together on their future course. In the first place, it was necessary to select a secluded and suitable spot on which to build a house. This was done, and they then resolved to erect one which should have a moat round it, and be fortified in as strong a manner as possible. It was finally arranged that the whole party should remain to assist in erecting the house, after which the men who had wives were to have houses built or found for them in the neighbourhood of some of the villages bordering on the forest, where they would be in a position to obtain information

respecting any future movement on the part of the sheriff or the foresters adverse to Robin and his friends, and where they would also be ready to render any assistance in their power.

As they sat round a huge fire, which they kindled near the foot of the Greenwood-tree, on the night of their arrival, Will was the first to suggest that they should choose Robin as their leader, and obey him as such for the future. They were all equal now, he continued, as neither he nor Robin laid any claim to the services of their father's dependents; and it was the wisest course they could adopt to select Robin, who was the most skilful amongst them with his bow, his quarterstaff, or his sword, to be their leader.

Robin protested that Will, having brought the greatest number of men together, was best entitled to the leadership of the band.

Will, however, would not listen to the proposal, and by common assent Robin was declared their captain.

Whereupon all present swore, on Robin's bow, that they would be true to each other, and to him, obeying all his orders, and observing with strict secrecy all his counsel. Robin made them also swear that they would rob no poor man of his money or his goods; that the weak should always have their assistance against the oppressor; that they would never strike a Saxon unless first struck; and that no woman or child, whether rich or poor, should ever, under any circumstances, be injured in person or in property. They furthermore vowed that they would keep no more of what they might get than sufficed for their ordinary

wants; but would distribute amongst the distressed and needy.

The following morning the whole party of men set to work to cut down trees, and afterwards to prepare them for building purposes. Many weary weeks were spent on this work, during which they heard no sound of horn in the forest, nor had communication with any beyond their own circle.

At length a large room was constructed on the same principle as Robin's old residence at Speed-swift, where the entrance was obtained by means of ladders from the outside. A large open space of ground was marked out in front of the house, and the moat indicated by lines cut in the turf. But the excavation of the latter was a work of so much labour that they determined to postpone its completion until they had supplied themselves with a greater quantity of the necessary implements. They found little difficulty in supplying themselves with food; and what they lacked in the way of corn for bread, Will supplied by several days' journeys, in the guise of a beggar, to Nottingham. At length the time came for the four married men to leave them. Robin had secured them cottages well situated for obtaining information upon any subject affecting himself and his friends, which would also serve as retreats in case of need. Each man was furnished with some money at parting, with which to purchase present subsistence, and a few implements of husbandry. There now remained in the Glade, Robin, Will, Marian, and twelve men.

On completing the house, they exercised themselves every day in the use of the quarterstaff, or the sword, until they became very proficient in the use of each. Robin and Marian, after their share in the practice of the day, would saunter off into the forest, their quivers hanging at their backs, under the pretence of shooting, but many a time returning without even a bird hanging from their belts, the time having passed in a much more pleasant way than shooting at game. There had long been a tacit understanding between them, the fruition of which—their union—had often been spoken of; nor was it thought, in the earnest simplicity of those times, at all improper for them to spend whole days in each other's company, wandering in the forest or living in the same house.

The troubles through which they had each passed made them full of care about their future. Robin had urged Marian to leave him and go with one of the couples to a neighbouring village, where he could visit her until their future became more bright and their prospects more settled. Marian's love, however, which knew no guile, made her refuse most resolutely her consent to such a proposal. They had known each other so many years, and loved each other with such a constant love, and with the entire approbation of their friends, that she would not think of parting now that unpleasant days had fallen upon him; and she was allowed to remain to superintend the duties of their new home. She little thought how her presence and her deeds were destined to inspire a whole band of men.

One day, as Robin and Marian were walking through the forest, far away from the Greenwood Glade, they were astounded at hearing the sound of a harp accompanied by a man's voice. They paused and listened. The voice, which was a rich mellow one, was marred by the deep emotion of the singer; and while they still listened, it ceased suddenly. Marian was desirous that they should return immediately, fearing that if they were discovered unpleasant consequences might arise. Robin believing that the voice proceeded from some one in distress, determined to see from whence it came. They both prepared, in case of danger, to defend themselves.

Stepping cautiously forward, they at length came upon the cause of their surprise. A young man, with bare head, was stretched upon the ground with a missal open before him. He lay beneath the shadow of some fine oak-trees, and near the bank of a tiny stream, that flowed from a spring close by, and ran in low murmurs past, as though to soothe his distresses. As they caught a glimpse of him, it was evident that their approach had roused him, for his head was raised and half turned in the direction whence they came. Observing this, Robin stepped forward, followed by Marian, and the young man sprang to his feet.

His astonishment was great at seeing two strangers standing beside him; but their appearance did not seem to cause the slightest alarm, although he must have seen that they were armed, while he was without any means of protection. His harp was now hanging on a low bough over the stream.

Robin asked if they could be of any assistance to him in directing him, as they fancied he might have lost his way. But he replied, with much courtesy, that that part of the forest was not unknown to him, although he had penetrated further into it than he intended when he set out.

The young man started with evident surprise when Robin, in answer to his question, told him his name was Robin Hood. The mention of the name seemed to quicken the very pulses of the stranger, and with a changed manner he told Robin and Marian the cause of his distress.

His name was Alan, and he lived in the Dale, a lovely spot not far off, where he had made love to a fair Saxon maiden, whose beauty, the pride of the Dale, had been the cause of all his sorrow. They were betrothed, he said, and loved each other fondly; but her parents had determined to break off the match, because an old Norman lord, of much wealth, residing in Dale Castle, whose name was Baron de Younglove, had offered to bestow on her father 500 marks, besides three acres of land, to have her in marriage.

This had made her parents look with indifference on the suit of Alan, whose sole property consisted of a few acres of land, and the guerdons which rewarded his skill as a harper. So Alan had been ordered never to cross Hardfist's threshold again. Yet, nevertheless, he had managed to get interviews with Ellen, whose hatred of the proposed match with the baron was as great as was her love for Alan. Notwith-

standing the adverse circumstances in which they had thus been placed, they had sworn to be constant to each other; and Ellen had pined through the weary hours of the day at home, under the watchful eyes of her parents, while Alan had found some consolation for his overburdened feelings in rambling into the forest, where, to the wild notes of his harp, he had tuned his love-sorrows.

"Can it be possible," Marian said, "that Saxon parents sell their child to a Norman baron for money and land?"

"Love, happiness, and life," pursued Robin, "cannot satisfy the greed for gold in any breast where Mammon holds his sway. But," he added, "two young hearts may baffle three old heads yet."

"Let us go to the old baron," said Marian, "and make him give her up."

All three laughed heartily at the proposition.

"There is a plan," said Alan, "I have thought upon, and Ellen has agreed to it, but which, for want of the assistance of a trusty friend, I have not been able to mature. It is for her to leave her home quietly, and without exciting suspicion, before dawn of the day fixed for the wedding, three weeks hence, and to join me at the outskirts of the forest. We will then"—

A smart clap on the shoulder, from Robin, startled and interrupted him.

"I have it," said Robin; "he shall go with us, Marian, to our forest-home; and," turning to Alan, "I promise you assistance, and a successful issue to your enterprise."

Marian seconded the proposal to accompany them with a hearty good-will ; and Alan, inspired with renewed hope, shook off his dull spirits, and amused his new friends with a description of the old baron who was trying to carry off his love.

Advanced in years, crabbed and infirm as he was, according to Alan's account, they wondered how love of any sort could find a dwelling in the heart of such a man. Nor were there stories wanting of the cruel treatment his first wife had received at his hands, to which whispered words were added of ghostly forms haunting the castle.

That night, sitting beneath the old Greenwood-tree, Robin unfolded his scheme whereby they might carry off the bride elect in the very sight of the old baron. Marian was to be the medium of communication between them and Ellen.

A few days after the discovery of Alan in the forest, there was a fair in the Dale, which Marian attended in the guise of a harper.

The very moment she commenced playing near the dwelling, which had been well described to her by Alan, the door opened, and there came out a long thin man with a scowl upon his countenance.

This was Eli Hardfist, Ellen's father. He seemed at first to be under the impression that the minstrel was Alan, who had many a time in happier days thus announced his coming to his love. Hardfist was evidently taken aback at the sight of Marian, and the scowl relaxed when she greeted him with the most winning of smiles, and a low courtesy. The melody

which Marian played attracted the attention of Ellen. It was a Saxon love-song used only between lovers—a song that Alan had sung to her many a time beneath the forest trees. She hastened to the door, and ere her father had reached Marian, was by his side. An unaccountable feeling of sympathy prompted her to invite Marian to partake of their hospitality for a few days. Hardfist, surprised at his daughter's animation, and delighted with the appearance of Marian, supported the invitation, and Marian, with a feigned unwillingness, entered the house.

"Father," Ellen said, when the day was half gone, "yon harp of mine"—she had had lessons on it from Alan—"has been silent for many a week; but only let this girl stay and teach me, and my sorrow will fly away, and I shall no more grieve after Alan."

"Beshrew the harp!" said her mother; "of what good is harp-playing to a girl that's betrothed; let her learn other duties now, that are more fitting the mistress of a castle."

"Nay," replied her husband, "Ellen will have no such drudgery as you speak of; let her learn her harp, it is a lady's accomplishment; and there are servants enough, I trow, to do her bidding at the castle."

Ellen shuddered at the very mention of the word "castle," and would have said something that might have betrayed her secret clinging to Alan, but at a glance from Marian she restrained herself. After a little persuasion, her mother consented, though not

without expressing her dislike at having a wandering harper brought into the household, although she knew it was by no means a rare occurrence among the Saxons.

Marian had managed to exchange a few words with Ellen, which made her determined to retain Marian. But all difficulties were swept away by the mother's consent, and thus Marian came to be installed as one of the household.

Marian's whole story was soon told Ellen, who caught eagerly at the proposal ; but vowed that, if it failed, she would throw herself from off the highest battlement of the baron's castle on the day of their marriage.

Marian's not returning on the day she set out for the Dale, gave Robin hopes that she had succeeded in obtaining an interview with Ellen. Alan was at first overjoyed at the plot, which promised such a fair conclusion ; nevertheless, though it had been understood between them that if Marian was received into the house, she would remain until the time named for the wedding, ugly fears and unkind doubts would start up in his mind, making him a prey to the most terrible attacks of melancholy. One moment, the future would present only bright imaginings, and, the next, misgivings filled him with despair.

To calm Alan's doubts upon the subject, Robin undertook to see Marian. He threw over his forest-dress, a ragged robe, which reached almost to his feet, slung two empty wallets across his shoulders, and took a staff in his hand. He, moreover, concealed about

his person a short sword to defend himself in case of necessity, and his horn to summon help. Alan was to remain in the forest, but within sound of the horn ; and carried another himself, with which to alarm the male residents at Greenwood House, who would respond to the call by their armed presence at the place of danger. These precautions having been made, Robin started for the Dale. Alan accompanied him half-way, and there awaited his return, whiling away the time, and trying, but in vain, to overcome his anxiety, by discoursing music with his harp, or by dreaming of the hidden future.

Robin had little difficulty in finding the house where Eli Hardfist lived ; and going up to the door, he knocked boldly at it, too boldly, perhaps, for his assumed character of a beggar. To his surprise, it was opened by Marian, who looked at him full in the face, as though puzzled about his identity.

“ Is it well ? ” he whispered.

“ Yes,” Marian replied ; “ I remain until the wedding, and we meet you in the church ; Ellen is happy and full of joy at the prospect of her escape.”

Here a shrill woman’s voice called out to know what Marian meant by parleying with a varlet at the door, to which Marian replied, that a poor man should never be turned from an honest man’s door, and begged some meat for him. There was a degree of excitement in Marian’s voice, that convinced Ellen it was a messenger from the forest ; so she filled a horn with liquor and carried it to the door. She eyed the beggar-man with much eagerness, hoping,

and yet fearing, that it might be Alan; and when Robin returned her gaze with a steady look, and she saw that it was not Alan, she drooped her head and blushed. Robin noted the change in her features, and as she handed him the horn, whispered one word, "Alan!" which convinced her that her surmise was correct.

"He is well," Robin added, as he withdrew the horn from his mouth, "and will not fail to meet you at the Dale Abbey."

Ellen was so bewildered that she answered not a word, but her manner told her joy; and Robin said no more, fearing lest her mother, who kept glancing at the door, should become suspicious. After obtaining his bread and meat, which he put very carefully away in one of his wallets, Robin left the house and proceeded on his way down the Dale, in order to avoid suspicion. Passing through the vale, he took a turn round, and passed by Baron de Younglove's castle.

Knocking at the gate, he asked for food, which a porter, blind of one eye, answered by threatening to pitch him into the moat if he did not begone. This sharp rebuke so roused Robin's temper that, forgetting his disguise, he nimbly laid hold of the man and pushed him headlong into the moat before he had time to help himself. Up came the man to the surface, with the muddy water streaming down his face, and with many grimaces, as he spat the mud out of his mouth, he waded to the bank. While he was doing this, Robin, who waited on the bridge to see whether he could swim or not, intending to help him

out if he could not save himself, bade him treat the next poor man with more civility than he had shewn him, and then started off before the porter had time to alarm the inmates of the castle, or summon some of the baron's retainers to chastise him for his conduct. The man drew himself slowly out of the moat and on to the drawbridge, from whence he eyed, with little satisfaction, the retreating figure of Robin, who was running at a pace faster than beggars ordinarily travelled. When Robin was clear out of sight, he calmly surveyed his own figure; and, with evident disrelish, slammed the gate after him as he entered within the precincts of the castle.

At the same time, the baron was engaged summing up the total cost of his new bride; and with a long array of figures before him, which a learned monk had cast up, he was beginning to experience the first charges to which, in prospect, he had committed himself. The result was not at all satisfactory, and to the monk's account he muttered, "Preposterous!" "Too much, too much," as though he had been estimating the cost of some new lands, or the expense of some alterations to his castle. To all the baron said, the monk gave a silent assent; and crossing himself, thanked Heaven no such vain thoughts, as those the baron had, ever entered his mind.

Robin, who kept on at a brisk pace, impeded only by fits of laughter at the deplorable appearance of the one-eyed porter, shortly found himself within the borders of the forest. He soon found his love-sick friend, and tormented him very much by insisting

upon relating his adventure with the porter before he would give an account of his interview with Ellen. Alan, bursting with anxiety, bore Robin's humour with ill-concealed impatience; and declared, after Robin had told him every incident attending his interview with Marian and Ellen at extraordinary length, that it was by far the shorter story of the two, and that he was the most tantalising love-messenger that had ever passed between Saxon youth and maiden.





CHAPTER VIII.

The Bishop of Hereford and Abbot Scaregrace—A Droll Marriage Ceremony—The Baron and the Bishop have a Dance—A Midnight Adventure—Robin and Alan retreat in safety to Sherwood.

THE time was now drawing near that had been appointed for the wedding at the Church of Dale Abbey. The baron was making great preparations to celebrate the event with due pomp; and, contrary to his usual custom, had even determined that the people of the village should participate in his joy, by drinking some ale, brewed specially, and having shared amongst them the leanest kine his steward could find in all his herds.

The Bishop of Hereford happened, when the event was within a week of celebration, to pay a visit to the abbot of Dale Abbey, touching a dispute they had had with each other about some land. Baron de Younglove hearing of this, sent a message to his lordship, inviting him, on the conclusion of his busi-

ness with the abbot, to spend a few days at the castle, and perform the marriage ceremony. The abbot consented to this arrangement cheerfully, on the baron promising to pay full fees to both; and the bishop came to be a guest at Younglove Castle.

Three days before the marriage, his lordship had parted from the abbot in a very unfriendly mood. Both claimed a title to the same land, and each refused to give up possession to the other. The original owner had managed to obtain a loan from both for the same land. The abbot, whose name was Scaregrace, parted from the Bishop of Hereford with the fixed determination to hold to the land, which lay conveniently near to his abbey, and had set the bishop at defiance, in the presence and to the delight of his monks.

The baron received his guest with all the politeness of which he was capable, considering the severity of the attack of gout from which he happened to be suffering. Fresh rushes were strewed on the floors, and the very best silk counterpanes he possessed were used to adorn the bishop's bed.

To prevent all possibility of misadventure, Robin resolved to confide their secret to Friar Goodly, and give him a special retainer to conduct the ceremony in the church in case the bishop, officiating on the part of the baron, refused under compulsion to perform the ceremony after the change which would be made in the bridegroom.

Discussing this with Alan, the latter suggested

that it would be a fit and proper opportunity for Robin to marry Marian,—a thought which, after due consideration, Robin entertained, and determined to act upon. Robin accordingly repaired to Narrow-flask Abbey, to see Friar Goodly.

Unfortunately for him, he could not get access to the friar, as he was then passing through a severe penitential exercise in his cell for some breach of the abbey rules. This was unfortunate, because he found that the term of the penance covered the day appointed for the marriage. A friendly friar, whom Robin met, while discoursing upon abbey rules in general, and the breach of certain rules in particular, pointed out to Robin the precise cell occupied by his offending brother, which was the third from the gateway. Robin could see the latticed grating distinctly.

After the friar had gone, Robin drew an arrow, and, blunting the head, shot it at the window.

At that precise moment the good man was on his knees, holding his string of beads in his hand; but through the heat of the day and the weariness of the flesh he was dozing. The arrow passed through the grating, and the feather tickled the nose of the friar as it flew past and struck the stone wall, then rebounded and fell on his bald head. His nose being tickled, caused him to sneeze, and the blow on his head completely roused him. There lay the arrow before his face, so he dropped his beads and picked it up. It was blunted he saw, for which he was devoutly thankful; and after consideration, came to

the conclusion that it could only have been shot from one bow, and that that bow belonged to Robin Hood.

He opened his latticed window, and catching sight of Robin beyond the gate, waved a handkerchief, to which Robin replied by holding his bow out with his cap on the end.

That evening, when all was quiet, the friar stole out of the abbey, passed through the gate, with his arms folded and face bent, as though he was going into the fields to meditate, and was quickly joined by Robin.

The result of their interview was that the friar determined to leave the abbey then and for ever, and share the fortunes and misfortunes of his friend Robin; and he also willingly consented to unite Robin and Marian, and Alan and Ellen, at the same time.

At length the important day arrived, to the great joy of Alan, who could scarcely realise the hope of the bright future that Robin persisted in picturing for him.

The baron had not seen his betrothed since the espousal had been agreed to by her parents; adopting in that case the prudent advice of her parents, who were fearful of what might be the consequences of a personal prosecution of his suit.

"Get her first," her mother had sagely observed to the baron, "and love will soon follow."

The baron, who had immense faith in his own powers, was loath to accept this advice at first; but

ultimately assented, and their first meeting as affianced lovers was to be before the altar upon the morning of their wedding.

Marian's services were found very acceptable by Ellen's parents as the time drew near, and it was determined that Marian should act as bridesmaid.

The baron, whose locomotive powers were but indifferent, arising from the fact that the gout had not entirely left him, had to be carried to church by some of his retainers ; the bishop riding on the baron's best horse by his side. They were the first to arrive at the church, where they found Abbot Scaregrace pacing in front of the principal entrance, with the keys in his hand. He met the baron with a request that he would at once pay him his fees, otherwise he would not open the door. The baron called his steward, who had with him, in two bags, both the fees and the dower, and bade him pay the abbot the bare fees, but add no present for his insolence. This the steward did, and the abbot handed over the keys of the church to a decrepit monk, whose form and visage bore the signs of unmistakable old age.

On receiving the keys, the old man toddled with comical alacrity to the door, and after rattling the key in the lock a good deal, succeeded in forcing back the bolt. The outer and inner doors were soon pushed open, and the baron and the bishop, with the steward and his bags, entered the church.

They had to wait an unusual length of time before the bride arrived. Meanwhile, there slowly sauntered into the sacred edifice a young man with a harp in his

hand. He advanced to where the bishop stood, and made a low bow.

"Thou art thrice welcome," said the bishop; "and if thou canst discourse skilful music, thou shalt have good pay ere the day is done."

"Ay, ay," the baron ejaculated, "that he shall, if he can put a fair maid into good humour on her wedding-day."

"If she be young, she can love," the harper replied, "I have the gift to foretell; and my harp shall wake within her such love for her husband as shall never fade."

"Nay, then, thou shalt have an earnest now," the baron said; "but, prithee, young man, give us a specimen of thy powers."

The harper, nothing loath, seated himself on a cushion, and ran his fingers carelessly over the strings, but with evident skill. Then he played some wondrously sweet airs, that mightily pleased the baron and the bishop; and the former bade his steward give the harper a largess, double the amount of the abbot's fees.

Ellen, accompanied by her father and Marian, entered the church. The bride's face was crimson with blushes, as, with downcast eyes, she walked up the aisle to the altar. But when the old baron hobbled up to salute her, she drew back in disdain, to the astonishment of the old man. Hardfist motioned the steward aside, and while the question of the dower, in fulfilment of the contract, was being discussed, there entered the church, in the most unconcerned

manner possible, first one, and then several, apparently prompted by curiosity to see the ceremony.

Ellen's blushes had been caused by the sight of the harper, who was then standing at the door of the church, and who followed her in and took his position beside a stout man in a long robe, who looked the most unconcerned of all in the church.

The whisperings between Hardfist and the steward were of longer duration than was seemly, and appeared to be of a difficult nature, for the baron was called to take part in them. At length the bags which the steward carried were handed over to the bishop, who now stood at the altar, and were deposited by him in a recess of the wall, pending the ceremony, after which they were to be delivered to Hardfist.

The scruples of the latter being thus satisfied, the bishop commenced the service by asking, "Who giveth this maid?" when, to the astonishment of the bishop, and of the baron and his party, Robin Hood started forward from a pillar against which he had been leaning carelessly, and throwing off his disguise, said there was one little change to make before the ceremony could proceed. At the same time Alan, harp in hand, stepped forward and placed himself by Ellen's side, to the intense surprise of the baron.

The steward, thinking to do a good turn for his master, laid hold of Alan to thrust him out of the way; but Alan quickly seized the man by the nape of his neck, and sending him head first at the stomach of the baron, knocked both worthies down at the same time.

The bishop dropped his book, and stepped back to reach the bags that had been handed to him, fearful of losing his fee ; but ere he could lay hold of them, one of Robin's followers leaped over the altar rails, and took the bags in charge. The church door was closed by two of Robin's men, disguised as monks, just as Hardfist was about to pass out to summon assistance. Disappointed in this, he returned to where the bishop still stood very much perplexed at these extraordinary proceedings, and in a loud voice forbade the altered ceremony; and ordered his daughter, as she loved him, to leave her hold of Alan, whom he characterised in terms more energetic than polite.

But Ellen clung all the harder to her lover, whose arm now encircled her waist.

Robin asked the bishop to go on with the service, and he would pay him double fees ; but the bishop, in a resolute voice, refused, and placing his book upon a seat, sat upon it with grim humour.

Robin told him he must, then, give up his gown to a better man, at which the bishop laughed ; but when Robin laid hold of him, and began to take his gown from him by force, he frowned and attempted resistance. Whereupon Robin called his stout friend, who proved to be none other than Friar Goodly ; and, notwithstanding the threats of excommunication to which the bishop gave utterance, his gown was plucked from him and assumed by the friar.

The bishop cut such a droll figure without his gown, which had covered all defects in his under-apparel, that even the steward could not refrain from

laughing. Patched in divers places with different coloured cloth, every garment he wore presented the appearance of a patchwork quilt.

The bishop attempted no further opposition after the loss of his gown ; but contented himself with sitting still and grumbling out objections at every stage of the ceremony.

The first he raised was, that the marriage would not be binding, because they had not been asked in church, as the baron had. But this Robin overruled by sending Friar Goodly up into the singing-loft, from whence he told him to put up the banns six times instead of three, and once again for luck.

This the friar did, amid forbiddings and protestations shouted out by the baron and Hardfist, to which no heed was paid.

Robin and Marian were observed in close conversation while the banns were being announced ; and when the friar had finished his seventh asking, Robin called out to him to go on with the others ; and, to the astonishment of all in the place, the banns between Robin Hood and Marian Harper were published in like manner.

At the first proclamation of Robin's name, a sudden silence fell upon the assembly, which was only broken by the voice of the friar from above. The well-known name, while it startled some, had silenced all.

After this part of the ceremony was over, the friar descended, and in a few moments he declared, amidst the cheers of all Robin's men, that both couples were duly united in the holy bonds of wedlock.

The bags of money were forthwith handed to Robin, who bestowed them upon Alan as the dower of his wife.

The friar then doffed his robe, and would have assisted to array the bishop, when Robin interposed; the bishop had refused to do the holy work which the Church empowered him to perform, and so, Robin said, before they parted, he should dance with the baron, while Alan played a lively tune on his harp.

The bishop declared they might take all his garments from him before he would condescend to take one step in an unholy dance.

Robin replied that, if he refused, they would drive him up the Dale without his gown, so that the people might see his patchwork suit.

The baron, who had not walked the length of the church for two months, vowed that they might kill him, but they could not make him dance.

These objections only served to increase the determination of Robin and his friends to have the dance.

Several of the men commenced stripping the baron of some superfluous over-clothing which he wore; and as each succeeding article was withdrawn, there were indications of the ultimate arrival at one affording a more comical appearance than that presented by the bishop. The very drollery of the scene caused peals of laughter to resound throughout the church, in which the steward joined at the expense of his master. Nor was the bishop proof against the queer figure of his proposed partner; as the men suddenly stopped in their work at the entreaty of the baron,

who promised that he would take a turn or two with the bishop.

The old lover stood upon his legs, and shook himself once or twice, preparatory to taking up his position.

Alan, seeing that the baron was ready, commenced a lively measure on his harp.

Two men advanced, with mock politeness, to the bishop, who, seeing that further resistance was useless, got up and placed himself by the side of the baron.

The sight was strangely ludicrous. The baron and the bishop eyed each other with some curiosity, as though in doubt of their personal identity; and it was evident to all that they had some difficulty in refraining from joining in the merry laughter that rose from all around.

Alan played the tune twice over before the reverend dancer and the baron gave symptoms of fulfilling their promise.

Robin, who sat upon the altar rail, was laughing so heartily at the appearance of the two gentlemen, as to lose all self-control; but seeing that there was no indication of a movement, he called upon them to begin forthwith, or, he vowed, he would make them dance in the churchyard.

Alan began to repeat the tune, for the third time, somewhat more slowly; and a very quiet shuffle of feet on the part of the couple indicated that the dance had commenced.

As they appeared to warm with their work, Robin

kept urging them to greater speed; while Alan quickened the time, and, at length, the baron and the bishop danced with an energy that surprised all.

The bishop appeared to take it very easily until the baron, warming at his work, thought it a shame not to be able to cut the bishop out, and so he capered faster and faster, round and round, now advancing, then retreating, in the most accomplished Saxon fashion. The bishop, not to be beaten, answered every movement of the baron with a corresponding action, but, being the stouter of the two, gave signs of great distress.

Robin, seeing the spirit of emulation that had taken possession of them, stimulated them to still greater exertions, by praising first one and then the other, and declaring they were the best dancers in England.

Shuffle, shuffle, shuffle went their feet, their arms hanging at their sides, and their heads bobbing up and down and sideways, until, from sheer exhaustion, the bishop tumbled up against Robin, who, sitting poised on the altar rail, failed to catch him in his arms, and was tumbled over into the lap of Alan.

The baron continued dancing after the music ceased, as though triumphing over the bishop.

Robin and Alan floundered about on the floor for a minute, and on regaining their feet, gave vent to their feelings in hearty shouts of laughter, in which all the others joined.

Hardfist at first looked gloomily on from behind one of the pillars, fearful of being called upon to take

part in the dance ; but after it commenced, appeared to have forgotten his fears and disappointment at losing his daughter's dower, and laughed until he grew purple in the face.

As to Marian and Ellen, who, with arms entwined around each other, stood close up to the altar rails, the tears ran down their cheeks from excessive laughter.

Friar Goodly, with Hardfist, and Soreside, and Hitsoft, and other friends of Robin, looked on with intense merriment until the dance ended, and then, in the excitement of the moment, joined hands, and had a rough caper without music, to the increased delight of the rest.

This over, Robin and the friar, with a thousand apologies, assisted to array the bishop, who, being out of breath, accepted all their attentions in silence. The baron was also assisted to dress by his steward and the old monk, the latter having been a silent spectator of the whole scene, scarcely comprehending it.

When the dance began, the poor old monk's head commenced nodding, as if in time to the music ; but it was not so really. It was owing partly to his extreme age, and partly to his horror at seeing so reverend a man as the bishop indulging in such an unholy pastime.

Before the party broke up, Robin told the baron that when next he sought a wife he should first of all gain the lady's approbation, and not attempt to buy her like an ox or an ass. The baron affirmed that he would gladly have given double the dower to be free

from such a union, as he had already begun to doubt its prudence; he blessed Heaven and the Church that while he had lost a wife he had gained his health, and that his dance had made him feel ten years younger than he was. Whereupon he challenged the bishop to another dance for 100 marks, which that sober prelate positively declined.

Robin also made the bishop and the baron swear before the altar, that they would neither of them seek to do any injury to himself, Alan, the friar, or any of Robin Hood's men, for what had transpired that day. This both of them swore to observe.

Forbidding any of the party to stir from the church for the next hour, Robin took the keys from the old monk, and having double locked the church door, took up the flags of the porch and piled them against it. They also locked the outer door, and inserted pebbles in the lock.

There were left in the church the Bishop of Hereford, Baron de Younglove, Eli Hardfist, the steward, and the monk.

It will, perhaps, be remembered that Hardfist had once attempted to leave the church for assistance, but that the door had been shut in his face by two of Robin's men in the disguise of monks. These men had been stationed at the door to prevent any of the villagers from entering during the wedding. Fortunately for those in the church, very few presented themselves for admission; and they, on being refused admittance, betook themselves to the village, where the baron's servants and the villagers busied

themselves about roasting an ox and some venison, and troubled themselves not a bit about the baron and his intended bride. There were, therefore, none about to see the barricading and the locking of the church doors.

Robin pitched the keys over the wall of the abbey as they passed, and then they made the best of their way, by a circuitous route, to the forest.

The keys were picked up by a monk who happened to have some duties to perform at midnight in the church, and so without a word he carried them to his cell.

After the lapse of an hour, the baron thought it was high time to be going.

They tried the door, but could not open it. Then the combined power of the party was applied to force the lock, without any effect. They shook the door and kicked it; the baron conjured it with some strong words, and the bishop besought it with mildness, to open for them, but still the door stood fast.

They shouted aloud, they screamed, they entreated, they made all sorts of hideous noises, but there was no response.

After many hours had been spent in this way, the bishop discovered a secret store of wine, which was hailed by them as a gift of Providence. The corks were speedily drawn, and the contents appropriated to other than sacred uses. Drinking this wine upon empty stomachs, after the excitement and fatigues of the day, made all feel drowsy.

It was late in the afternoon when this happened,

and the whole party, with mutual concurrence, collected together the cushions, cloths, and vestments the church contained, and disposed themselves for a short sleep.

They were, however, more drowsy than they were conscious of, for they slept soundly for several hours, until the solemn hour of midnight came; and even then were not roused by the knocking of the monk at the door.

The brother who had late duty to perform had betaken himself to the church that night as usual. He lost much time in opening the outer door, by reason of the pebbles, which however, after considerable trouble, he managed to extract.

The sight of the gravestones piled up against the inner door, convinced him that some evil spirits had been at work; and so he hastened back to the abbey, and roused the abbot and all the order.

Dressed in full canonicals, the abbot duly sprinkled the gravestones and the church door with holy water, using the service for the laying of evil spirits. Then the stones were removed one by one, and the door was unlocked.

The abbot ordered it to be opened, and the torch-bearers to advance. They were very reluctant to do so, and some time elapsed before a movement was made.

The moment this was done, a voice was heard from out the darkness. It was that of the Bishop of Hereford, who, partially roused by the noise outside, shouted out, "No, I'll not dance, I'll not dance!"

and immediately another voice, that of the baron, exclaimed, "Take her away, she's yours now!"

The abbot motioned the torch-bearers to proceed up the aisle, but they resolutely refused.

Half the monks had slipped off, believing that evil spirits had taken possession of the church. The remainder stood together in a frightened group close to the door.

The abbot mumbled a few prayers, and then with one united voice they summoned the spirits to depart.

The noise they made roused the rest of the sleepers, and the old monk, being the first to recover full possession of his faculties, and seeing the light, made towards it as fast as his old limbs would allow. The peculiar patter he made was, however, too much for the nerves of the abbot and his friends, and as the noise neared them the torch-bearers flung down their torches, and with the abbot, who certainly was not the last, they bolted as fast as their legs could carry them.

The noise roused Hardfist, who picked up the torches, and was speedily joined by his friends. They were astonished to find the doors of the church open, and were passing through the churchyard when the abbey bells broke out into a dismal peal, as though they shared the terror of the ringers.

The bishop and his friends made the best of their way to the abbey, where, after some little time, they were admitted.

The abbot, surrounded by a number of the monks,

all arrayed in their vestments, received the bishop very curtly, and demanded his business.

To which the bishop replied that he wanted entertainment for the rest of the night, as it was too far to walk to the castle.

Whereupon the abbot, across whose mind a ray of light flashed, inquired, with a frown, where the ladies were.

The bishop replied that they had been gone many hours.

But the abbot further inquired what had become of the lady he spoke to when they opened the church door.

The baron looked at the bishop, and the abbot frowned on both ; the steward, as much puzzled, repeated the question in a whisper to Hardfist, who, unable to comprehend what was meant, thought that entanglements would never cease, and shook his head sagely.

The bishop asked the abbot what he meant. The monks, in chorus, chimed in with their leader, and matters appeared to be assuming serious proportions.

The steward suggested that perhaps the old monk could explain what was meant, but he was nowhere to be found.

The poor old man, thinking he had had enough of the marriage ceremony, at any rate for one day, had betaken himself to his couch, having followed at the heels of the abbot and the monks on their flight from the church, and passed unquestioned to his cell.

After some time he was found, and brought in to

tell his story of the day's proceedings, which he did in such a way as to lead the abbot to the conviction that his reverend brother had been guilty of the most grave improprieties.

The old man alleged that the bishop brought a harper into the church, and some strange men ; that he closed the church door, then stripped off his robe, and danced with the baron ; and that he afterwards locked the whole of them up in the church, and drank the wine.

The bishop protested, and the baron explained, but all was of no avail ; and the abbot declared that he should bring the conduct of the bishop before a full conclave of abbots, and, by the punishment of one, deter all bishops in the future from desecrating abbeys with unholy games.

Long ere this the newly-married parties with their friends reached their home in Sherwood without molestation. That evening the ceremony of the day was celebrated by a feast in the most primitive fashion, enlivened by songs, accompanied by harps, and varied by the telling of some love-story or romantic adventure.





CHAPTER IX.

Two Kings visit Nottingham—Robin and John Little have a Fight upon a Bridge—Baptism of Friar Goodly, John Little, Hardlock, and the Miller's Son—Baron de Younglove prepares an Expedition to capture Robin Hood.



AFTER the defeat of the sheriff and his party, there followed a cessation of hostilities for nearly a year. One reason of this was, the intelligence formally conveyed to the sheriff of the intention of King Henry II. to spend the Christmas of that year, 1179, in Nottingham, where he was going to have as a guest William, king of Scotland. The governor of the castle called upon the sheriff to furnish him with skilful artisans to prepare suitable rooms for the entertainment of the monarchs. This was the first time that the king had visited the town in the shrievalty of Gammer, and it was only natural he should feel extremely anxious to give them a suitable reception. Clever workmen were accordingly selected from amongst both the Normans and the Saxons, and sent to the castle; and the sheriff after-

wards made preparations for a series of grand entertainments in the town.

These consisted of pageants to parade the streets—of shows, in which the various trades of the town were to take part. There were to be bulls baited at the various crosses; and animals to be roasted for the general refreshment of the people.

A great fair was also to be held, during which time all the shops were to be closed. The chief reason for holding it was, to provide food for the king's table, and such other necessities that the king's purveyors might think fit to seize for the use of the court.

This fair opened two days before the arrival of the king; but he had sent his purveyors on before him; and they were the first customers that the poor stall-keepers had. The object of the fair was so well known to the shopkeepers, that the display of goods made did not satisfy the royal purveyors, who seized three-fourths of the things exhibited, and had them immediately carried off to the castle, to be stored for the king's service. Upon these articles they put a value, which was not equal to their cost price; and gave orders on the king's exchequer, payable at some distant date.

A levy was then made upon the town to supply the deficiency, and a certain number of animals and requisites of every description ordered to be delivered at the side gate of the castle every morning, on pain of a severe penalty.

In order to meet this demand, the sheriff made an allotment of the several quotas that each division of

the town was expected to contribute ; and the heaviest levy was made upon the Saxons.

The king came, and was welcomed with the applause of the people, as a matter of course. The keys of the town were presented to him by the sheriff, who afterwards escorted him to the castle, where he was dutifully met by the governor, who tendered him the keys of the fortress, and then conducted him to the quarters prepared for him.

Afterwards, William of Scotland arrived with his retinue, and was received with due ceremony, and led to the castle, where he was met by Henry. The festivities continued for a whole week, during which the kings laid aside all ceremony, and entered like other men into the sports and pastimes provided for the popular amusement.

All the time the people had to provide in most unequal measure for the king's table ; and crowds of followers who came in the retinue of the king levied mail of every description on the poor tradesmen.

When Henry left, he gave Sheriff Gammer a very substantial token of his good-will in the shape of a present of plate.

In the forest at Greenwood Glade, the winter was spent more sensibly than by the court at Nottingham. The band completed the construction of the moat around their house ; and further enclosed the whole ground on which the house stood with a close wall of stout palings.

Ellen and Marian employed their time in spinning, and the evenings were invariably enlivened by the

music of Alan's harp, and songs from all the company.

With the return of spring-time the full joys of forest-life returned, and excursions were made to all the villages round about the forest by Robin, Will, or Alan, disguised as beggarmen, for the purpose of visiting their friends. In every place they heard the same complaints from the unfortunate Saxons of harsh treatment, the Normans following in this respect the example set them by the sheriff of Nottingham.

Returning one day from a visit to Mansfield, Robin was in the forest when, as he was descending the slope of a hill to cross a stream in the valley by a rough bridge composed of a single tree which was laid across it, he encountered one who was in after years to be associated with him in many a rough encounter.

He was a man of most unusual size, who, as he caught sight of Robin coming from an opposite direction, quickened his pace, in order to be the first to cross the bridge. The man had no other weapon with him than a huge stick, which he used to walk with, but which was fully seven feet long. He strode along like a giant, but with a lounging gait. Robin quickened his pace too, and both reached the stream at the same moment.

The bridge, however, was so narrow that two could not pass each other on it. Both men were now on it, and they both seemed determined to advance. Robin still wore his disguise, underneath which he carried his bow and arrows, while his horn hung at his side.

The giant, seeing Robin still advancing, shouted out,—

"Get thee back, varlet, or I'll pitch thee into the stream!"

Robin stood still, and, drawing an arrow from his quiver, was preparing to string his bow, when his opponent again called out,—

"I'll baste thy hide with my staff, if thou dost offer to touch the string with that arrow."

Quoth Robin, "Thou pratest like an ass, for I could send this arrow through thy hide before thou couldst raise thy staff in the air."

"Thou art a coward to say so!" replied the stranger; "but had I a bow, I would put thy skill to the test. Thou dost want to take advantage of me, because I have naught but my staff in my hand."

"Nay," said Robin, "thou dost lie to call me a coward; and let me but cut a staff, and I'll fight thee right willingly."

"Agreed," quoth the stranger; "cut thyself a staff on that side, and I'll remain on this while thou art about it."

Robin retreated to the bank, and, making choice of a young oak-tree, soon provided himself with a staff. He returned to the bridge, waving his staff over his head as he went.

Quoth Robin, "Let us fight on the bridge, and whoever succeeds in tumbling the other into the water shall be the victor."

"Agreed, agreed," said the stranger, at the same time advancing to meet Robin.

The bridge spanned a narrow, but deep and rapid stream; and the bridge, which consisted of a roughly

hewn tree, did not give a very steady footing to the ordinary passenger.

The combatants advanced to meet each other on the bridge ; and, after a few preliminary flourishes, fell to in right good earnest. At first both succeeded in escaping a blow by skilful parryings ; then, as though he had found out his opponent's weakest point, Robin dealt a blow on the stranger's side, which evoked a significant grunt.

"One," Robin said, as he sprang back after the blow.

"Granted," the stranger replied ; "but I scorn to die in thy debt."

So to it they went again right hard and fast ; and then the stranger gave Robin such a thwack upon his head, as made the blood trickle down his face. This seemed to rouse Robin, and he twisted his oak staff about with such skill as to deal a blow with every motion of his hand, until the stranger's sides must have smarted severely from their effect. The increasing storm of blows wrought the giant to a fury, and at length, with one fierce blow, he toppled Robin into the water. There was a sudden splash, as Robin disappeared from sight ; but in a moment he rose to the surface, and, shaking his head, struck out for the bank.

"Hallo !" shouted the stranger, as Robin swam along, "where art thou now, my fine friend ?"

"Swimming with the tide," Robin responded, as he turned on his back in the stream, and kicked up his heels. Then striking out to the side, he drew himself

out of the water with the aid of an overhanging bough.

When he got out, he saw the stranger was still seated on the narrow bridge, laughing at the figure he presented with his dripping garments.

After shaking himself once or twice, Robin drew his horn from beneath his cloak, and putting it to his lips, blew a loud blast. Then going up to the stranger, he laughingly complimented him on being the victor; and while they were still discoursing somewhat sharply about the battle, there suddenly appeared on the scene Will Stoutly, Alan, Scathelock, old widow Headlock's son, and several others.

Running up to Robin, they gravely saluted him. Will, seeing him still dripping with water, asked him what had happened; whereupon Robin told him that the stranger, in fighting, had tumbled him into the water.

"Nay, then," quoth Will, casting aside his bow, "he shall have a taste of the water likewise."

Before Robin had time to interfere, they laid hold of the stranger to duck him. But he was not so easily managed as they had anticipated; and, in the scuffle, both Will and Alan fell with him into the water. Robin watched the fray, laughing; but when he saw them all in the stream together, ran on to the bridge, and, as the stranger's head rose above the surface, saluted him with the inquiry,—

"I prithee, my fine friend, where art thou now?"

They all swam to the bank, and the stranger, in ill humour, said he would fight the whole of them,

cowards as they were, if they would only allow him to plant his back against a tree.

But Robin interposed, and declared that he was the bravest man he had ever met with, and that there should be no more fighting. So they shook hands all round.

Robin, seeing that the stranger was restored to good humour, invited him to remain with them in the forest and become a rover, promising that he should have good cheer all the year round. This was gladly accepted by the stranger, who declared that he was flying from Mansfield to save his ears, the foresters having threatened that they would cut them off for slaying the king's deer. Robin, on hearing this, was the first to grasp his hand and bid him welcome to their band; and every man, in turn, gave him a hearty slap on the back in token of their approval of his decision.

It was proposed that they should have a grand feast that night to celebrate the accession of so brave a man to their ranks, and on their way towards the Glade, Robin shot a fine fat doe. This they carried between them to Robin's house, and then all hands were summoned to prepare the feast.

Friar Goodly looked with astonishment on the height of the stranger; and merry peals of laughter arose as Robin placed the friar and the stranger back to back, and marked the friar's height on the other's back.

Marian suggested that if they had a feast, they should have a christening at the same time; and as the

friar and the stranger were the latest accessions to their family, they might very appropriately be baptized. This proposition was warmly supported by Ellen.

The stranger protested that he had had enough of water for that day.

The friar urged that, as the spiritual adviser of the whole house, it did not comport with his dignity to suffer baptism at the hands of any layman.

When, however, Will suggested that wine should be used instead of water, and that the baptizing should consist, not of an external, but an internal application, the friar withdrew all objections.

Fires were lighted, the venison roasted, and strong liquor brought out. After full justice had been done to the spread, preparations were made for the christening. First of all, names had to be chosen.

The stranger told them that he had hitherto rejoiced in the name of John Little, whereupon the friar suggested that it should be changed to Little John, which gave general satisfaction.

Next came the question as to a name for the friar; and, after many had been mentioned and rejected, Marian archly proposed that he should be called Friar Tuck. The gentle imputation conveyed in his new name tickled the friar's fancy, and he vowed that henceforth he would be known by no other name.

At the same time, Robin proposed that Hardlock should be confirmed in the nickname he had borne for several years of Scathelock.

This was also agreed to ; and, finally, a diminutive fellow, who had been brought to the Glade by Scathe-lock, was sworn in as a forest rover, and received, amidst uproarious laughter, the name of Much. He was a miller's son, and had run away from home to avoid the wrath of Gruff, from whom his ears were in danger.

A half circle was then made in front of the Greenwood-tree. Robin assumed the office of baptizer, and, arrayed in the friar's vestment, called in a solemn voice for the infants that were to be baptized. Here-upon Marian advanced, leading Friar Goodly by the hand ; and Ellen followed, holding the hand of John Little. They advanced to Robin, who rose to receive them.

"Who giveth this babe a name?" asked Robin, pointing to the friar.

"I," Marian replied ; "Tuck is to be his name, if it please thee."

Robin held a horn in his hand, which Will had filled to the brim with wine. Turning to the friar and those about, he asked, "Doth it content thee all, my good friends, that this pretty babe be called Tuck?"

Roars of laughter succeeded the question, which Robin took as the assent of the company.

"Then," said Robin, "henceforth, and for ever, be it known to all present, or that may come after us, and to all the world, that this babe is to be called by no other name than Tuck." Then handing the horn to the friar, he added, "Drink, my pretty one, to the general good-will of the whole assembly."

The friar raised the horn to his lips, gradually elevating his arm and throwing his head back, nor stopped to breathe until he had swallowed the whole of the contents.

This feat excited the emulation and drew forth the applause of all present.

The same ceremony was repeated over Little John ; who failed, however, to empty his horn, the good example that had been set him notwithstanding.

Finally, Scathelock and Much were christened as the others had been. The ceremony over, the whole band spent the rest of the evening in drinking, music, and singing.

The next day, all were up at sunrise to see an exhibition of the boasted strength of Little John. He was a full head and shoulders taller than the rest of the company ; and at wrestling or pitching, beat them all, but when they came to try their skill at the butts, he was found to be the worst shot in the company. This was not owing, however, to want of skill, as he made vast improvement after shooting with the rest for an hour or two ; but he had neglected to use his bow for some time before the unexpected encounter with Robin in the forest. He soon made such progress by diligent practice as rendered him a good shot.

The unexpected conclusion to Baron de Younglove's proposed marriage, was not long kept a secret in the Dale. The Abbot Scaregrace made diligent use of the scandal that the wedding had given rise to ; and circulated, far and wide amongst the abbeys, his version of the Bishop of Hereford's conduct.

As this was based entirely on the evidence of the old monk, it may be inferred that the bishop's share in the ceremony of the day was understood to be of the most eccentric character.

The old baron, who was not at all liked in the Dale, notwithstanding his show of hospitality on the inauspicious day, after reaching his castle in safety, racked his brains to find out some method of punishing Robin Hood. The oath that he had taken had no weight with him, for the Bishop of Hereford, before he parted from him, solemnly released himself and the baron, at the same time, from all observance of the oath, as it had been forced upon them, not taken of their own freewill.

The loss of his money ultimately became a source of considerable irritation to the baron. During the winter months, he fell into a state of much inactivity, and gradually became fat; then the gout seized him once more.

He was some time in determining which of his grievances he should make an excuse for summoning the sheriff of Nottingham to his assistance. He finally decided on the loss of his money-bags in the church of Dale Abbey. It also became a part of his revenge to have the marriage with Alan annulled, and then, with the concurrence of her parents, to force Ellen to a marriage with himself.

The steward was despatched on sundry occasions to consult with Eli and Dame Hardfist, as to their feelings upon the matter; and they were always found in the same mood with regard to their daughter's

marriage. The sorest point to them was the loss of the marks and land which the baron had promised them. They cared little about their daughter, but only about her marketable value, and brooded over their disappointment as a grievous wrong that had been inflicted upon them. They listened with evident satisfaction to the baron's proposals, which embraced a new offer of the payment of a similar sum to that agreed upon in the first instance, provided they consented to the baron's present arrangements.

To carry these out, the baron first despatched a monk to the Bishop of Hereford, who forwarded him a document absolving Ellen from her marriage with Alan, and licensing the baron to contract marriage with her instead.

Having provided himself with this, he further undertook to capture Ellen and her abettors; and for the purpose of obtaining the necessary legal powers, he persuaded Eli Hardfist to accompany his steward and a monk to Nottingham, to have an interview with the sheriff.

It was in the summer of 1180 that the trio set forth on their errand. They found the sheriff a most willing auditor, ready enough to supply the baron with the necessary legal authority to apprehend Robin Hood and all the forest rovers, and confine them in the dungeon of the nearest prison or castle, until such a time as the sheriff might find it convenient to convey them to Nottingham for trial.

The steward drew an exaggerated account of the number of stout men the baron had in service, all of

whom were to be engaged in the contemplated capture of Robin Hood.

The sheriff was much pressed to accompany the party, so as to lend the weight of his presence to the expedition ; but he gravely excused himself, by stating that the town could not dispense with his services. His real excuse, however, was a well-grounded fear of again meeting with one who had already, on two different occasions, treated him rather uncere- moniously. He protested that the capture was a thing of the simplest possible character, and that he was unwilling to take part in a project where the honour was of such a nature as could only redound to the credit of one man.

The steward was mightily flattered by the sheriff's arguments, and, after spending a few days in Nottingham, returned to Dale Abbey.

On their way through the villages that lay on their journey, they boasted loudly of the intended capture of the notable Robin Hood, and exhibited, to gaping crowds of Normans and Saxons, the authoritative seals appended to the warrants which they carried. They little thought how their boasts were laughed at by some amongst the Saxons, and that their premature vaunts would lead to their ultimate confusion.

Through the forest they rode with their precious documents, until at last they came to Dale Castle.

The baron received them with mighty good pleasure. The gout had made the thought of revenge very sweet to him. Not that he cared much about Ellen after his treatment in the church, but there was

a lurking feeling of dignity lost amongst the people which he was anxious to retrieve.

Reckoning with grave certainty on effecting the capture of Robin and his band, he caused the dungeons of the castle to be repaired for their reception. The old doors of these dungeons had not been opened for many years, and grated ominously on the ear as they were pushed open. There was no sign of decay about the walls or floors, and very slight repair seemed to be necessary to render them perfectly secure. They were four in all, and sufficiently large to imprison upwards of a hundred people. As these preparations were being completed, the baron's belief seemed to slide into an absolute certainty, that Robin would be caught; and in his conversations with some of the leaders amongst his dependents, he even spoke of him as already a prisoner in the castle.

The baron sent round amongst his tenants, demanding their attendance at the castle, with a certain number of retainers, on an appointed day, to accompany him on the expedition into the forest.

The store of arms in the castle was examined, and a number of spears, cross-bows, and slings brought out, wherewith to arm the force, in case any of them came unprovided. Thongs of hide were also prepared, wherewith to bind the prisoners together.

When the day came, there were assembled at the castle a few over one hundred men.

The baron determined to lead them himself; and as he calculated upon the instant submission of

Robin at the sight of such a force, he gave no other directions than that the enemy were to be surrounded as soon as they came in sight, and not one of them suffered to escape. The prisoners were then to be bound, and held, while the monk, whose name was Fittight, married the baron to Ellen.

This the baron regarded as a master stroke of punishment, and fondly pictured the confusion of Ellen, and the rage of Alan at his loss.

At length the expedition was reduced to something like order, and started for the forest. At the head the baron was carried in his litter by six stout men; on his right walked Fittight, and on his left Hardfist. In his hand the baron carried the warrant for the apprehension of the rovers, with the great seal dangling from it.

Immediately behind came the steward, carrying two money-bags, slung one over each shoulder; these contained the money to be paid over to Hardfist.

It had been agreed between them that the bags were to be in the custody of Fittight until the ceremony was concluded, when they were to be handed over to Hardfist. But, by a secret arrangement that the baron had made, he provided for the safe return of the money to his own coffers; several of his men having been commissioned to rob Hardfist of the money as soon as the ceremony was over.

After the steward came the fighting men, four abreast, armed with slings, cross-bows, and spears. They looked uncommonly fierce at the people assembled to see them march from the village.

At the end of the column were sundry horses, laden with provisions for the refreshment of the party before and after the attack.

The baron believed that the force produced immense effect upon the people, as it slowly wound its way through the village towards the forest.

As they passed the dwelling of Hardfist, the baron saw Dame Hardfist, in her best bib and tucker, waving her hand in token of her good wishes to the expedition. This the baron acknowledged with a stiff bow, chuckling in his sleeve at the pleasant little stratagem he had concocted for saving the dower he had promised in exchange for his spouse.

As soon as they entered the forest, the baron gave orders for a general halt. It was an uncommonly hot day, in the month of July. The object of the halt was a twofold one; the first being considered by the men the most important. This was to drink to their success. The baron thought by this to make them enter on their expedition with more readiness, and to induce them to act with increased vigour. One of the horses carried two casks of strong liquor, which the steward was ordered to tap. He unslung his money-bags, and deposited them in the care of Friar Fittight, who sat upon them, to the evident satisfaction of Hardfist, whose eyes sparkled as he thought of the little plans he and his worthy dame had discussed for laying out the money.

The main body of the force evidently considered that they were only expected to make a show in the operations of the day, and the proposition of the

baron was hailed with a shout of satisfaction, which he regarded as the presage of the day's victory. They did not require a second hint in reference to the contents of the barrel ; but, casting their weapons on the grass, crowded round the steward in all eagerness to taste the baron's ale. Drinking-horns were produced ; and as both barrels were tapped at the same time, to equalise the balance, the whole force was speedily supplied. The ale was of the strongest possible brew known to the steward, and its effect was speedily seen in the liveliness of the men.

When all had drunk, the baron called the men around him, for the purpose of deciding on the best mode of proceeding. That Robin was in the forest, the baron knew ; but where, was the question on which he desired counsel. Some proposed that they should remain in the forest until they found him ; others, that they should divide their numbers, and search for him in several directions. After considerable discussion, it was finally resolved not to divide their force, but to press forward into the heart of the forest, relying upon Providence to bring them face to face with the rovers of Sherwood.





CHAPTER X.

The Baron releases a poor Prisoner—Unexpected Appearance of Robin's Band—Robin throws off his Disguise and captures the Baron—Trial and Punishment of the Offenders—The Story told by the Run-aways in the Valley.



AFTER a short rest, the order was given to march forward, and the whole force prepared to advance. They did not, however, preserve the same order, but straggled about, dragging their weapons behind them. They had marched in this way about three hours, when the sound of a human voice was heard at some distance. The whole band paused and listened. There was no doubt about the matter; the voice was that of a man, and he seemed to be in great distress. The baron ordered the band to form in companies, and march in the direction of the voice, which they did very reluctantly. The sound increased, and they were soon able to make out a cry for "help." As there appeared to be only one voice, the band gathered courage and pressed forward.

They came, at length, upon the cause of their alarm, and found that it proceeded from a man bound with supple thongs, hard and fast, to a tree. The thongs had been passed round his arms, legs, and waist, so that, without assistance, escape seemed impossible. He appeared to be in great distress. He wore the garb of a beggar, and his empty wallets lay on the ground beside him, together with a staff which had been broken in two. His face was covered with blood and dirt, as though he had been thrown savagely to the ground and severely injured. His hair was all matted with blood, and his garments were torn in several places.

On making the discovery, the whole force waited until the arrival of the baron; but with an evident disrelish of what they saw.

The baron was carried up to the man, and he immediately ordered him to be set at liberty. On this being done, the man threw himself on one knee before the baron, and poured out a torrent of thanks for releasing him.

On being questioned, he stated that, coming through the forest that morning, he had met the foresters, that they had searched him, and, not finding any money, had bound him to the tree. He had resisted; therefore, they ill-treated him, covering him with blood. He gave such a description of the men, as caused the baron to declare most emphatically that they were not foresters, but none other than Robin Hood's men.

At the mention of Robin Hood's name, the man declared that the baron was right; that the whole of

the band was under the leadership of one they called by that name.

The baron nodded sagaciously towards the monk, who was busy telling his beads. The steward wore a troubled look, remembering his midnight vigil in Dale Abbey Church. The knees of Hardfist knocked against each other; and the whole band crowded together, and looked as if they wished themselves out of the forest.

On being further interrogated, the man stated that Robin's band was divided into three parties, each party having a separate leader; and when they met him, they were on their way to Nottingham, to meet the sheriff and a number of soldiers who were coming into the forest to take Robin. They had said they meant to hang the sheriff for breaking an oath he had taken not to molest Robin; and the soldiers were to be bound to trees in the forest, and left to starve.

"Heaven deliver us!" exclaimed the monk on hearing the man's story, a sentiment which seemed to be shared in by all present.

The baron appeared to be specially uneasy at the intelligence, and shook his head from side to side, as though to assure himself that no rope was yet encircling his neck.

"It's a mercy," the baron at length said, "that this fierce band has taken the road to Nottingham; but I was not aware that any force was coming to assist us. Perhaps," he suggested, "we had better make our way round" (giving an intimation with his hand, that he

meant a roundabout way) "to Nottingham, and join our force with that of the sheriff."

Universal assent was accorded to this suggestion of the baron's. The men were weary with their long march, and the monk suggested that they had better have some refreshments before they started on their still longer march to Nottingham. The baron ventured a mild dissent, wishing to start without further delay in that neighbourhood; but seeing that the universal feeling was to make a good meal then and there, he, with some reluctance, gave his consent. Forthwith the horses were unloaded. The roast meats, in huge joints, and loaves of bread, were unpacked and laid upon the grass.

The men disposed themselves as they felt inclined; and the monk stood up, at a signal from the baron, to pronounce the grace. Just as he raised his head and stretched forth his hands in compliance, there came echoing through the forest the sound of a horn. Friar Fittight dropped his arms, and looked round with manifest terror. Ere the sound had died away, there was a second echo from an opposite direction. The men sprang to their feet, and looked as though they were preparing for a good run. Again, there came the sound of a third horn, from another direction, and, almost immediately, there was the noise of many men in the forest.

The poor man who had been tied to the tree, on hearing the horns, had started to his feet like the others, and, wringing his hands, ran backwards and forwards, shouting, "Robin Hood, Robin Hood!" The

old baron sprang from his litter with more alacrity than he had done since the ceremony in Dale Church; and, hobbling about, called loudly for the bearers. They were in the crowd, and too intent upon a discussion which was going on as to their next movement, to heed the baron. Again there was a noise of men approaching through the trees; but, before their appearance, the majority of the baron's men were on their way to the Dale as fast as their legs could carry them.

The baron saw Friar Fittight about to participate in the general flight; but, with considerable agility, laid hold of him by his robe and sprang upon his back.

At the same moment, from three opposite quarters, there came bounding in three columns of men, numbering thirty in all, every one dressed in green, and carrying a bow and a short sword at his belt.

The friar had commenced running, as well as he was able, with his burden, but was collared by Will. Alan, at the same time, laid hold of the steward, who was making the best of his way off with the money-bags across his shoulders, and Eli Hardfist by his side. When the steward was stopped in his career, Hardfist stopped too, as though he wished to look after the bags more even than his own safety. The horses, which had been tethered to some trees, remained; and the band, in their great hurry, were found to have left not only the feast, but also their weapons behind them.

To the astonishment of those of the band who re-

mained, the poor man whom they had released from the tree suddenly appeared in a dress exactly similar to that worn by Robin's men.

This was no other than Robin Hood himself, who had assumed the disguise, and acted the part described, to enable him the more easily to regulate the conduct of the band.

"Will and Little John, with your men, follow the fugitives, and bring a few back," Robin shouted. "Alan and his band remain."

The men directed, nothing loath, set off in pursuit; they had no difficulty in following up the track of the others, who were heard shouting as they ran. When the men in green made their appearance, the laggards seemed to be overpowered with terror, fell trembling on their knees, and, in pitiful accents, begged for mercy.

Will, who led the pursuit, ordered his men to shoot a few arrows over the heads of those who were escaping; while Little John and two of his men went on in advance, and secured six of the stragglers.

These were immediately marched back to where the others were. They found that Robin had placed the baron, Friar Fittight, the steward, Hardfist, and the others in a group together, and had placed several men with drawn swords in charge of them, who had orders to kill any one who attempted to move.

The sheriff's order for Robin's apprehension, and the Bishop of Hereford's special licence for the baron's marriage, were in Robin's hands, and he was shewing to Alan and his men the wonderful writing and the grand seals attached.

Alan proposed that Fittight should read them aloud ; but Robin, who had ascertained what they were about, declared they should be read at the trial of the leaders of the expedition.

Meanwhile, he ordered that the whole of the prisoners should be divided into two groups and well guarded. The meats and drinks provided for the members of the expedition were then merrily discussed by the rovers ; and Robin made them all drink success to the baron's enterprise, a toast which was received by the company with much favour.

While they were thus engaged, the baron looked on with considerable agitation visible in every line of his countenance, as though the recollection of a certain dance, in which he had been one of the actors, followed by a solemn vow, haunted him.

Hardfist kept his eyes upon the money-bags, which Alan had again got in his possession ; and looked more troubled about his second loss of the marks, than in fear about the treatment he might be subjected to.

After the feast had been kept up with considerable humour for some time, the prisoners were invited to refresh themselves ; but their appetites had so far failed them, that they could by no means do justice to the tempting viands. When all appeared to have done their best, the weapons left behind by the fugitives were carefully collected, and on proceeding to load the horses with them, they came across the thongs with which Robin and his men were to have been bound. The discovery caused considerable

merriment. The men would have thrown them away, but Robin said they would come in useful after a while, if they were long enough to hang a few men with ; whereat some significant glances were exchanged by the unhappy prisoners.

Robin permitted the baron to ride on one of the horses, which was almost as much punishment to him as walking would have been, as there was no saddle on its back. The rest of the prisoners were bound together by the thongs, and ordered to move forward.

Into the forest they went, marching several hours. At length, Robin blew a note upon his horn, which was immediately replied to, and in a short time the whole party came upon an open space in the forest, where they found a fat buck roasting over a fire, which filled the air with its odour for a considerable distance round in the most appetite-provoking manner.

Here were Marian, Ellen, Friar Tuck, and several others. Ellen, on seeing her father, ran up to him and cast her arms about his neck, bidding him not be vexed with her, and making many inquiries about her mother. Hardfist received her embraces sullenly, but condescended to answer her inquiries.

"Now," said Robin, when they had all reached the spot, "welcome every one to the brave man's forest-home ! Especially welcome are you all, save the oath-breakers ; and no harm shall come to any save them."

At this the major part of the prisoners seemed to become more cheerful ; but Baron de Younglove was

so alarmed at these ominous words that, had not some of Robin's men been near to catch him, he would have fallen from his horse. Marian went up to him and, under the pretence of administering some water, whispered that he need not fear ; but the baron shook his head mournfully, as though he had made up his mind to be hanged.

It being announced that the buck awaited their pleasure, the whole party, with only one or two exceptions, appeared quite ready to fall to. Friar Tuck, on receiving from Robin a signal for grace, exclaimed,—

“What you are about to receive may the baron have to pay for. Amen.”

Robin's men laughed heartily at the friar's mode of asking a blessing,—the prisoners contenting themselves with a low chuckle. The baron sat swaying himself to and fro, recalling his broken oath, bemoaning his condition, and dreading the fate that might be in reserve for him.

After the feast was ended, Robin gave orders to form a circle for the trial of the prisoners. Marian and Ellen were constituted judges, and the first to be tried were the baron, Friar Fittight, the steward, and Hardfist. These, Robin declared, were the leaders of the expedition against himself and his band, and should be punished with extreme severity if found guilty. The four men were, accordingly, placed in the centre of the circle.

First the case of the baron was gone into. Robin was the principal witness against him ; and deposed

to the circumstances under which they first met in Dale Church, and the baron's solemn vow. Then he described how the hostile party had been led into the forest by the baron. The principal evidence, however, against him, consisted of the deeds which were found in his possession, and which Robin stopped in the course of his address to have read.

Now Friar Tuck was not learned enough to read them, as Robin knew, and so he called upon Friar Fittight to read them aloud. The friar, with a sour visage, rose to comply with Robin's request; but, before he began, Robin threatened that, if he varied one word, he would have him tied by his heels to a tree, and called Friar Tuck to stand by Fittight's side, and follow him as he read. Friar Tuck saw the joke; but stepped forward very gravely and placed himself next to Fittight. As the friar proceeded in his reading, Tuck nodded affirmation at intervals.

The recitation of the crimes that Robin and his men had committed caused loud laughter, which was changed, however, to a shout of indignation, as the document declared that the baron should be invested with power to execute summary vengeance on those of the band who resisted his authority, while Robin and some of the leaders were to be locked up in a dungeon of the nearest castle, which was that of Younglove's, and kept on low diet, until such time as the sheriff was at liberty to remove them to Nottingham for execution. Nothing was said about a trial; and the baron winced as Friar Fittight read that clause. Next was read the Bishop of Hereford's

absolution from the oath taken by the baron in Dale Church; and, finally, the special licence for his marriage to Ellen in the forest.

Alan shook his fist at the baron when he heard that, but Ellen and Marian laughed outright. The reading of the documents being concluded, Robin demanded that the judges should order the baron to have his ears cut off and nose slit, for coming into the forest with an armed band against him and his men, especially after the oath he had sworn. This demand was received with a loud shout of approval by Robin Hood's men, who were restrained with difficulty from exercising summary vengeance upon the baron. When order was restored, the judges declared that there was no further need of any evidence against the others, and they should consult about the sentence; whereupon they conversed in low whispers, while some of the rovers, in obedience to a signal from Robin, brought some thongs and a sharp carving-knife.

After a short time had elapsed, Marian bade the prisoners stand up to receive judgment. She told them they had been convicted on the clearest evidence of having conspired to take, slay, or cause to be slain, Robin Hood, his friends, and associates. That their crime was aggravated by the previous good treatment they had received at the hands of Robin Hood. They, therefore, were of opinion that, for the good example of the whole, and of the sheriff and others, the baron and his steward should be immediately hanged.

Four stout men then stepped forward, and pro-

ceeded to bind the two on whom sentence had thus been pronounced. The rest of the prisoners looked on aghast, while the baron and the steward trembled from head to foot. In accents the most piteous the baron begged hard for one more trial to be allowed him, and laid the whole blame of his conduct on the Bishop of Hereford and the Sheriff of Nottingham. The steward joined in the cry for mercy, and declared that he had had no hand in the transactions whatever, except to follow his master's injunctions. Hardfist and Friar Fittight looked on, in anything but a happy state of mind, as shewn by sundry nervous twitchings that affected their frames. The baron made all sorts of promises with regard to his future conduct, if only his life was spared. At length, touched by his entreaties, Marian and Ellen came and knelt before Robin, begging for mercy toward the baron.

"As judges," said Marian, "we could come to no other conclusion than that we have given; but, as members of your band, we beg you to have mercy on these poor, though offending, men."

Friar Tuck joined his voice to that of the fair suppliants; and Robin, who had no intention of carrying out the extreme punishment, ordered his men to unbind the prisoners again.

Robin then called the leaders of the band together, and, after a short consultation, offered the baron his life on the following terms:—

1st, That he took a second vow that he would never, directly or indirectly, aid, counsel, or assist

any one, or himself plot, to capture or betray Robin Hood, or any of his men.

2d, That whenever Robin Hood or any of his band were hard pressed by their enemies, and sought shelter at the baron's castle, that they should be received, protected, and delivered from danger.

3d, That, in consideration of the entertainment he received, he would pay yearly 100 marks towards the general expenses of Robin Hood's band.

When these terms were propounded, the baron declared his willingness to accept them; and took an oath, propounded by Robin and Friar Tuck, that he would observe them to the end of his life.

All the other prisoners were required to swear never again to meddle with the forest rovers on pain of instant death. This concluded the ceremony attending the mock trial. Will, who had a keen relish for the ridiculous, now suggested that they should have another dance before they parted. This was agreed to, and he was made master of the ceremonies. Alan brought out his harp, while Will arranged the dancers.

The baron had another reverend partner in the person of Friar Fittight, and the steward was placed opposite to Hardfist. The dance, however, was not half as comical as the one in Dale Church; the baron seemed too infirm, or too dispirited, to throw the vigour into his steps he had displayed on the previous occasion; and at Ellen's intercession, on her father's account, the dance was brought to a speedy termination.

When this was finished, Robin ordered the wine-cask to be broached, which had been provided specially for the entertainment of the baron; and every one was invited to drink, "Confusion to all foresters, and success to all forest rovers!"

Robin next had the bag of marks opened, and divided amongst those present. Every member of his band received three marks, and, as a politic measure, the prisoners one mark each. The effect of this was of the most satisfactory character, for the members of the unfortunate expedition vowed that they would do Robin and his men a good turn, if ever it lay in their power.

It was now too late for the baron and his party to return that night; so a huge fire was constructed, round which they sat several hours, drinking the baron's "humming strong" ale, and telling stories of adventures in the forest while hunting the king's fat deer. Then one after the other dropped asleep, and by midnight only the sentinels remained awake.

Robin and Alan, with their wives, accompanied by eight of their men, had repaired to Greenwood Glade House, whither, as a matter of prudence, they did not think it wise to convey their prisoners.

So the latter slept all night on their beds of turf, and were roused at sunrise by the singing of the birds in the trees over their heads.

The men whose fleetness of foot enabled them to escape capture, continued running long after their pursuers had ceased the chase. They were led in

the race by a man who was called Longshanks, from his great speed; and he fully justified his fame as a swift runner on this occasion. When they were nearing the castle, a brief consultation was held. Their approach could not fail to attract notice. They were unarmed, had no wounds, were without their leaders, and—"Where was the baron?" would, they knew, be the first of a series of questions they should find difficult to answer.

At length a plan was hit upon whereby they hoped to save their fame, and a story made up to account for the absence of so many of the party.

First of all, they tore their garments as though by spears, afterwards many of them pricked their hands and faces with thorns, so as to make them bleed. In this state they approached the castle.

Round about the entrance there had been lounging all the afternoon a number of people, to see the expedition return with the prisoners they had so bravely captured.

The appearance of the men spread through the valley with great rapidity, and before they fairly reached the castle there was a great crowd assembled. The few servants left in charge sallied out, and waited on the drawbridge for the men to come up, and amongst others the one-eyed porter. As the men came down the hill-side, the people noticed that the baron and the friar, and many others, were missing; also that the horses were not with them, and that the men were without arms. The porter fixed his solitary eye upon the forlorn group as they came

straggling along, and stood as though petrified at their appearance.

"Where's the baron?" "Where's the baron?" some shouted as the men came up. "Where's Hardfist? oh, where's my dear Hardfist?" queried the dame of that ilk, catching hold of Longshanks.

"Don't ask me, dame," the man replied; "ask Heaven, for they're all slain!"

At this a thrill of horror passed through the crowd.

"Look at us," Longshanks continued; "we've had spears thrust through and through our garments. 'Twas a mercy one of us was left alive. But we peppered them though, and left Robin Hood and all his men dead in a heap together. But the baron's dead, and the friar, and Hardfist, and the steward, and a sight of our brave fellows! Heaven help us!"

All the fellows reiterated the story Longshanks told, though with some slight discrepancies. Two or three boasted that it was by their hand Robin was slain, while some few stated that Robin was not quite dead when they left the field.

Dame Hardfist fell to wringing her hands, and calling aloud upon her poor dear husband.

The people listened to the story of the battle with mouths wide open; and little circles crowded round each warrior, isolating him from his fellows, and examining the rents in his garments, and touching his wounded hand or cheek in silent wonder.

Of all the crowd only one was bold enough to express a doubt about the valour of the men, and

discredit the story of the death of so many on both sides.

This was the one-eyed porter, who, as he listened to the stories told by one and by another, vowed they were mightily different in their tales, and looked as if they had been dragging each other through some thorn-bushes.

Some of the men who had come from a distance were received into the houses of the people that night; and, while still telling their stories over again in the morning, were astonished to hear a loud shout resound through the valley.

Out into the roads the people ran, and, to the astonishment of many, the delight of some, and the confusion of the first batch of heroes, they saw, coming down the hill into the valley, the baron, the friar, the steward, Hardfist, and the rest of the members of the expedition. They descended the valley with loud shouts and waving of hands, not a man missing, —all alive and well.

The people ran to meet them with open arms, and embraced them with the most frantic expressions of delight. To their astonishment the new warriors had no bruises about their person, nor rents in their clothes. Their story was soon told, but only to be told again and again before the conclusion of the day, to the mortification of the runaways, and to the immense credit of Robin, whose name was henceforth known in the valley as that of a brave and generous man, the resolute defender of his home, and the friend of the poor Saxon, wherever found.



CHAPTER XI.

The Marriage of Sheriff Gammer—Robin's Adventure with the Potter—Robin sells Pots in Nottingham—Lives with the Sheriff—Brings the Sheriff into the Forest—Capture of the Brothers Cobble.



AFTER the events detailed in the preceding chapter, nothing occurred worthy of record during the remainder of that year. The glory of the expedition, and what befell it, was not long in reaching Nottingham, where it was told, with numerous wonderful additions, both in the Saxon and Norman quarters of the town. The sheriff heard of the affair, and laughed at the result of it, but was too pleasantly engaged at the time to trouble himself much about it. The fact was, that Gammer had fallen in love, and he was busy courting about the time the expedition started. Two other reasons that doubtless contributed somewhat to his growing indifference to Robin and his doings were, that time was effacing the memory of the rough usage he had received in the forest in conjunction with Gruff; and that, as sheriff, he did not come into such contact and opposition

with him as he did when head forester. He was, however, always ready to assent to any proposal for his capture; but the carrying out of it he left to the foresters, or any one who felt himself specially aggrieved.

Before the news of the baron's treatment reached Nottingham, the sheriff was married, and too much absorbed in the joys of newly married life, to care anything about the baron's misadventures.

The winter came again, and the poor Saxons in Nottingham were plagued as in the winter preceding the king's visit. They bore their sufferings with considerable patience, vowing amongst themselves that the day should come when they would have revenge.

Robin's men, soon after the baron's expedition, exchanged their Lincoln green attire for the garb of labourers, and repaired to their several homes. They reported to Robin, in the course of the winter, that there were scores of men about them who were ready, at a very short notice, to join him in any excursion he might propose.

There remained at Greenwood Glade House only such as Robin selected to be his permanent followers.

At length the dreary winter passed away, and May-day came, which was celebrated by a feast, at which all the scouts and stout friends in the villages round about were present. Robin found, to his joy, that he had a band of between sixty and seventy on whom he could rely.

A few weeks afterwards, Robin proposed to Will and Little John that they should go in search of an

adventure in the forest, leaving Friar Tuck and Alan with the other men to make provision for the day's dinner.

It so happened that, on that day, a fair was being held in Nottingham, and they determined to go along the high-road to the town. They had not proceeded far when they heard a man's voice singing :—

“ For they quaff'd mighty ale,
And they told a blithe tale,
And so will we do now,
Jolly hearts, jolly hearts, jolly hearts,
And so will we do now.”

As they listened they heard the crunching of wheels, as though the singer was driving a cart.

“ Master,” quoth Little John to Robin, “ I know the voice—it's Breaklock the potter. I've met him at Mansfield, and he gave me three such strokes as I shall never forget.”

Robin laughed.

“ I'll wager you ten shillings,” said Little John, “ there's not one amongst us who can make him stop against his will.”

“ Done !” cried Robin ; “ you two stand aside, and I'll meet him.”

Little John and Will drew aside behind a neighbouring tree, to watch the encounter.

Robin threw himself upon the ground to await the coming of the potter. He was dressed in green, and wore at his side a short sword, while a buckler hung at his back.

As soon as the potter came in sight, Robin sprang up, and with a hasty step made toward him. The

potter was riding in a rough cart filled with pots, drawn by one horse. Robin seized the horse by his head, and bade the potter descend and pay him toll before he proceeded further.

"What dost thou want?" asked the potter, surveying Robin with astonishing coolness.

"Thou hast haunted this road three years or more," Robin replied, "and thou hast never yet shewn so much courtesy as to send me one penny of toll."

"What is thy name, and wherefore dost thou demand toll from me? Art thou the king, or one of his foresters?" the potter asked, with a loud laugh.

"I am lord of this forest," Robin replied; "and my name is Robin Hood."

"Nay then, Robin," quoth the potter, "thou shalt have no toll from me, save some strokes on thy hide, so let go my horse."

Robin refused, whereupon the potter went to his cart and drew thereout a good stout quarterstaff. Robin drew his sword, and was on the point of unslinging his buckler, when up came the potter and, with a back-handed blow, knocked the buckler out of his hand.

"That potter will trouble our master, I fear," quoth Little John to Will.

Robin stooped to pick up his buckler, when the potter gave him such a blow on the neck as brought him to the ground.

"That's enough," cried Little John; "let's to his help, or surely the potter will slay him."

Out from behind the tree sprang Will and Little

John. The potter started as he saw them approach, and retreated to his horse.

"Shall I have your ten shillings?" said Little John to Robin, who still lay on the ground; "or will you have mine?"

"Nay," quoth Robin; "if it had been a hundred shillings, in good faith they would all be thine."

"It is full little courtesy, as I have heard wise men say," exclaimed the potter, "to stop a poor man in the roadway, and try to rob him of a toll."

"Thou speakest the truth," Robin replied; "and thou mayest drive forth every day if thou likest, and shalt never be hindered of me or my men."

"It were well," quoth Will, "that one of us had yet a blow or two in exchange from the potter."

So saying, he drew a knife from his belt, and made as though he would have cut a staff.

"Nay, nay," said Robin; "one bout is enough to try the mettle of a man, and though mine has been a short one, he shall fight no more to-day."

The potter, however, declared that he was scarcely beaten, and right willing to fight all three, one after the other; but Robin would not consent. He then proposed to accompany the potter to Nottingham, and help him to dispose of his wares; but the potter replied, that there was more profit to be had in the forest than by selling pots in Nottingham.

"Then," quoth Robin, "I'll e'en go by myself and sell thy pots; thou shalt exchange clothes with me, and abide with my men until I return, and thou shalt have full payment for thy pots."

The potter laughed at the request, but, perceiving a chance of some forest sport, cried, "A bargain," gladly.

Will and Little John urged Robin not to venture upon so dangerous an enterprise, that the sheriff was no friend of his, and, if he were known, would hang him before his men could hear of his capture.

Robin would not listen to their fears. So he and the potter changed clothes; and Robin vowed he would not bring a single pot back with him on the next day, when he promised to meet the three two miles out of Nottingham.

"If thou dost sell them all," the potter shouted, "thou shalt take my good pots to Nottingham as often as I come this way."

"An thou makest a good bargain," Will added, "bring us some green cloth for coats for our men."

"Ay, that I will," Robin replied; "and I'll bring the sheriff himself too."

There was a loud laugh, and then Robin bade them "good morrow," and started on his journey, leaving the potter to be entertained until his return.

Forward jogged Robin, cracking his whip and singing away, until, at length, he reached Nottingham. He drove boldly into the Norman quarter of the town, fixed his cart in front of the sheriff's gate, and gave his horse to the ostler of the Norman Arms Inn to be stabled. Then, standing by his cart, Robin shouted, at the top of his voice,—

"Pots, cheap pots;

Who'll buy my ware?

Pots, cheap pots;

None so cheap in all the fair!"

Wives and widows pressed round, pricing his goods, which, to their astonishment, they discovered were really the cheapest ever sold at Nottingham fair. Pots that were worth tenpence, Robin sold for sixpence; and others that usually fetched fivepence, he charged threepence for.

At so cheap a rate, he soon found customers, who bought freely, and then shook their heads, saying he could not have been a potter long, or he would have known his trade better.

When Robin had almost emptied his cart, it was about noon, and seeing that he had but five pots left, he gave over selling, and, carrying them in his hand, knocked loudly at the sheriff's door. A maid came, to whom Robin gave the pots, telling her they were a present to her mistress. The girl looked up at Robin, believing he was only jesting; but when she saw that he really meant what he said, she took them, and ran off laughing. In a few minutes she returned with the sheriff's wife, who insisted that Robin should go in and dine with herself and her husband.

This was just what Robin wanted, so in he went boldly. He met the sheriff in the yard, and greeted him with a low bow.

"See what the potter has given us," Dame Gammer said, holding up the pots.

"He is full welcome to my house," replied the sheriff; "let us go in to meat."

The sheriff led the way into the house, which Robin saw was supplied with every luxury of the age. In the dining-room were costly chairs with carved

backs, and a solid oak table was spread with platters, drinking-horns, and knives. Over the fireplace hung a bow crossed by a spear, and in the centre a quiver. Robin cast a hasty glance around, but, without appearing to notice anything, sat down to table.

During dinner, hearing the two waiting men speak of a great shooting match for forty shillings, which was to come off that afternoon, he made up his mind that, whether invited or not, he would be present at the match.

After dinner was over, however, the sheriff invited him to go and witness the shooting, promising that he should see right good sport. Forth they went to where the butt was placed. The sheriff's men began shooting, and seemed mightily pleased when they hit the target within half-a-bow's length of the centre. Seeing this, Robin could no longer contain himself.

"If I had a bow," said he aloud, "I'd shew you how to shoot."

"Thou shalt have a try then," said the sheriff, "for thou dost seem a likely man."

The sheriff's men laughed at the idea of the potter beating them.

A man was sent to get a number of bows, from which Robin chose one. He drew the string, but declared it was but weak gear, whereat the men who had been shooting laughed again, and bade him take care he broke no pots with his bolt. Robin heeded them not, but, fixing a bolt on the string, shot, and struck the target in the centre.

The sheriff's men stared, but vowed they would

have another shot. Again each man fired with no better success than before, while Robin a second time struck the centre of the butt. The others were very angry at their defeat, while the sheriff himself laughed heartily, and made game of his men.

"Potter," said he, "thou art a man, and worthy to bear a bow in any shooting match."

Robin protested that he had shot but badly, and declared that, if he had had the bow which lay in his cart, and which Robin Hood gave him, he should have shot much better.

"Dost thou know Robin Hood?" the sheriff asked, laying hold of him by the shoulder.

"Ay, that I do," Robin replied; "and as I go back to-morrow, two miles from the town I shall meet him to deliver some green cloth for his men, which he bade me buy."

"I'd give £100 to meet with him," exclaimed the sheriff, fiercely, his almost forgotten wrongs suddenly reviving at the unexpected mention of Robin's name, and especially at the chance of capturing him at last without much difficulty.

"If you will only do as I advise you," said Robin, "you shall see him to-morrow before we eat bread."

Robin proposed that the sheriff, accompanied by one man, should go with him in the morning into the forest. Robin was to drive the cart, and, to avoid exciting suspicion, the sheriff and his man were to lie down on the bottom of it and submit to be covered with the cloth that was intended for Robin's men.

The sheriff was very particular in asking the pre-

cise spot where the potter had agreed to meet Robin. The potter assured the sheriff that that very morning he had encountered Robin in the forest, and that he was to meet him the next morning alone at the same spot. The shooting match was broken up, Robin being adjudged the winner of the prize, and receiving the forty shillings.

Home he went with the sheriff, who was elated at the prospect of capturing Robin. There was a good supper provided. Bed-time came, and Robin was shewn into the best spare room in the house; and when he and the sheriff parted for the night, he flung himself into the bed, and, burying his face in the silk coverlet, laughed himself to sleep at the success of his plot.

In the morning, the sheriff was up full early. One of his most trusty men was chosen, and the secret imparted to him of the merry errand they were going upon. While they were talking over the plan with Robin, Dame Gammer went and purchased the cloth the potter wanted, which the sheriff vowed he would make him a present of, for his services, besides the £100. Robin saw the sheriff count the money out and place it in a bag, which was then fastened to his girdle. At length, the cloth being brought, and a quantity of clean straw laid over the bottom of the cart, the sheriff and his man, whose name was All-luck, got in and were covered over with the cloth. Robin thanked Dame Gammer for her kind entertainment; and then drove out of the sheriff's yard, along the streets of Nottingham, through one of the principal gates, and on towards the forest.

The sheriff and All-luck were provided with swords, and a stout cord wherewith to tie Robin's hands together ; and Robin, as he walked by the side of the cart, heard the sheriff chuckling and laughing in anticipation of getting his old foe into his power.

Robin thought the forest never looked so fair as on that morning, when, with his strange burden in the cart, he drove within its precincts. The trees overhung the road along which the cart jolted and tossed, and on every hand merry songsters poured forth their joyous notes, singing sweetly to the old trees, that sang again to them, as a gentle zephyr played amongst their leaves.

They had travelled fully two miles when the sheriff, growing uneasy, asked the potter whether Robin was not in sight, or whether he had missed the place of meeting. Robin replied that they had indeed come to the place, but he saw no one.

"In which case," said Robin, "I was to blow a gentle blast upon my horn."

"Thou didst not tell me that before," said the sheriff, in a serious voice.

Robin had adroitly managed to drive the cart on the very edge of the roadway bordering a deep ditch, and loosening the girth of the horse, turned the cart quickly round, and tilted the sheriff and his man head over heels into the ditch. At the same moment he blew a loud blast on his horn.

The sheriff and All-luck shot out of the cart like two bags of sand, and rolled over each other, disappearing for some moments in the mud and water at

the bottom of the ditch. Both men scrambled to their feet, with their heads, faces, and dresses covered with mud in such a way that Robin, at the first glance, could not distinguish one from the other. Both men appeared quite bewildered. They stroked the mud from their faces, and spat it out of their mouths. Being almost blinded, and consequently not knowing which way to turn, they stood still in the ditch until they were able to see.

"Potter," the sheriff exclaimed, "thou hast served us a dirty trick, and shalt dearly rue it."

Robin roared with laughter at the figure the sheriff and his man cut, and paid no heed to his threats.

Before the two were well out of the ditch, up ran Will, Alan, the potter, and Friar Tuck.

The sheriff, very much perplexed, gazed intently upon the three as they came up, as though he looked for Robin; but failing to recognise him, turned to the supposed potter, and was about to ask him what he meant, when Will, raising his cap to Robin, exclaimed,—

"Save thee, Robin Hood! good master, thou art right welcome."

"Ay, truly welcome," added the friar.

Said Alan, "But who are the strangers so bold that press into our domain?"

"Thou hast deceived me," said the sheriff to Robin.

"Nay," quoth Robin; "thou hast deceived thyself. I promised you should meet Robin alone, and thou hast been alone with him up to now; but didst thou think I was going to wait all day for the coming

of thy wits to teach thee who was thy guide? Nay, verily, I've kept my promise; and now shalt thou spend a day with Robin, and fulfil thy part of the bargain, so just hand over the £100."

The sheriff, fearing that resistance would only provoke punishment, unhung the bag of money, and threw it on the ground.

"I had the misfortune to get into the ditch," Robin said to the potter.

"Thou art a bad driver," replied he; "but hast thou sold the pots?"

"Ay, all of them," Robin rejoined, "save five, which the sheriff's wife was pleased to have from me, and for which she now sends me this bag of gold."

The sheriff and All-luck paid little heed to the passing conversation, but busied themselves in scraping the mud off their clothes.

Robin declared he would not be behind hand in entertaining his guests, in return for the manner in which he had been treated at the sheriff's house. The sheriff protested that he had very important business to transact in Nottingham, and begged hard to be allowed to depart; but the rovers protested that they would never be guilty of such a want of courtesy towards guests invited into the forest by their master.

The potter exchanged clothes with Robin again, and received the full price of his pots, and a handsome present besides. But Robin found that his customers had spoken wisely when they said he had not been a potter long, for he had sold his wares at prices much below their value. The sheriff and All-luck

were very unwillingly obliged to accompany Robin and his men into the forest, but to a part far distant from the Glade House. They came upon a place prepared for their dinner, and some tempting venison roasting over the fire. All the time the sheriff was made the butt for all sorts of jokes, and received constant reminders of the several disasters that had come upon him in chase of Robin Hood.

At length he and his man got leave to depart, and were accompanied some distance by several of Robin's men.

Dame Gammer had not been able to keep secret the object of her husband's journey; and on the walls were assembled a large number of the sheriff's friends, to see him enter with his prisoner. Late in the afternoon he arrived with his attendant, but minus his prisoner; and both presented such a figure, through the mud having in many parts dried upon their clothes, that all who saw them burst into loud laughter; and their entry into the town was of a most undignified character.

The sheriff was excessively annoyed at the trick that had been played upon him by Robin Hood, and very charitably wished all potters were baked in their own furnaces, and as to the rovers, vowed that he would hang the very first that fell into his hands.

The opportunity for carrying out his determination was, unfortunately, not long in occurring. The very day of the sheriff's visit into the forest, his old comrade Gruff had effected the capture of three stout young men in Mansfield, on a charge of stealing the

king's deer. These three were brothers of the name of Cobble. They were called respectively, Jerry, Jaunty, and Jolly, and lived with their widowed mother in the village. In the intervals between their rude farming occupations, they amused themselves by snaring hares or trapping foxes, like many others in the village, and so imbibed an unconquerable love for these sports. At length they flew at higher game, and many a fine deer became their victim. Nor were these deeds done in secret, but openly; and the produce of the sport was fairly divided amongst their friends.

In this way, such a degree of friendship existed in the place, that Gruff had found the greatest difficulty in detecting the offenders. Whenever a forester was sent by him to watch in the neighbourhood, the man's presence became generally known in the village, and while he remained lurking about, the less exciting labours of the field were indulged in by way of change, and to escape detection. As soon, however, as the man was withdrawn, the game was hunted with all the more zest by the villagers after their forced abstinence.

So matters had been going on, from year to year, in all the villages in the neighbourhood of the forest. Sometimes the deer would lie down in the very sight of the villagers, as though they were desirous of being invited to walk into their larders; or some fat hares would fall asleep in their gardens, amongst the very herbs in which it was customary to cook them. In such cases, the virtue of the villagers was not proof against temptation; and so the hares found themselves

cooking amidst their favourite herbs, while the deer received their invitation by a trusty messenger from the bow.

The three young Cobbles were leaders in every sport that took place in Mansfield. They had no equal with the bow ; and could kill a bird with an arrow, or knock it over with a bolt, better than any one in the village. They were as skilful in trapping hares and foxes ; and never returned from the forest without a haunch of venison, unless they pleased. They were daring ringleaders in every adventure ; and good sons to their widowed mother, who was entirely dependent upon them for support in her old age.

Gruff had thrown his evil eye upon them many a time. Grown desperate at last, he determined to watch in the forest himself, and, accompanied by one forester, see who the rovers were that thinned the deer. So night after night, and day after day, for nearly a fortnight, they kept their stealthy watch.

One moonlight night, when the thin clouds skimmed across the face of the heavens, throwing into rapid shade, or bathing in light, patches of the forest, they heard from their hiding-place (which was a comfortable corner amongst the branches of an oak) the sound of voices, that they recognised as those of the three brothers. There could be no mistake about their identity either, for they called each other by name. Under the very branches of the tree on which the watchers sat, the brothers stood, on the look-out for their prey, and in a few minutes a fine fat buck, shot through the side, fell dead within a dozen yards of the

tree. Gruff heard one propose to carry an antler home, because they were so short of drinking-horns; and after some time had elapsed, during which they were employed in cutting the animal up, they departed, laden with the spoil. Gruff and his fellow could have shot the three from where they sat, but were too much afraid; and the young men were allowed to depart quietly. As soon as the brothers had gone, they descended from the tree, and repaired to Mansfield, where they remained the rest of the night. In the morning, Gruff sent messengers to neighbouring villages, summoning the foresters to meet him in Mansfield that night.

Accordingly, at the hour appointed, no less than twenty foresters were assembled, and they then proceeded to Dame Cobble's house, which they quietly surrounded.

Gruff knocked loudly at the door.

Hearing the noise, the dame roused her sons, and Jerry, the eldest, demanded who was knocking.

Gruff replied, that it was the king's foresters.

Jerry bade him go elsewhere.

The next moment, however, the door was broken open, and Gruff's men poured in, followed by their leader.

In a moment the three brothers were seized, and their hands bound behind their backs.

The house was searched, and an antler that had fresh blood upon it, and a large quantity of venison, were found. The antler was carried off, to be used in evidence against the prisoners; and the whole party

then left the house before the presence of the foresters was known in the village.

Dame Cobble wept bitterly when she saw her sons bound, and begged hard that they might be released, to which Gruff only answered with a hoarse laugh. The old woman then attempted to follow them, as they went off with her three sons, but was rudely thrust back into the house, the door of which was fastened from the outside.





CHAPTER XII.

The Trial and Sentence of the Cobbles—Their Rescue by Robin Hood
—The Bishop of Hereford's Visit to Dale Abbey—Robin captures
the Bishop, and makes him dance in his Boots.

GRUFF and his men succeeded in conveying their prisoners to Nottingham without being molested, and they were lodged safely in Nottingham Jail. In the morning the foresters repaired to the sheriff's house, and narrated what had happened. The antler which was found in the house was produced, and this was held a conclusive proof of the men's guilt.

The sheriff repaired to the jail, where the men were brought before him. A jury was impannelled, which was composed of six foresters and six Norman householders. The evidence was repeated in the presence of the prisoners; the jury found them guilty, and the sheriff sentenced them to be hung the following morning in the Saxon market-place, as a warning to evil-doers in general, and the Saxons in particular.

Orders were given for the construction of the gallows; and while the people were employed on the work, a little matter, of infinite importance to the prisoners, was taking place in the forest.

When some of Dame Cobble's neighbours were passing her house that morning, they noticed that the door was fastened on the outside. This excited their suspicions; and, on going up to the house and calling out, they were answered by the dame within, who besought them to let her out.

The door was quickly opened, and the poor woman released. She told her neighbours what had happened, and then, leaving them to talk over the matter, hobbled off on her way to Nottingham.

That same morning, Robin, having risen with the lark, was sauntering through the forest, when he met the poor old woman, who was crying bitterly as she walked. In answer to his inquiries, she told him that her three sons had been captured by the foresters, and taken to Nottingham. Robin tried to console the old woman, by vowing that he would rescue them ere three days were fled.

He led the old woman into the forest, and meeting with Friar Tuck, directed him to keep her in the house at the Glade until he returned. Then exchanging garments with the friar, he hastened to Nottingham, where he saw the men busy erecting the gallows in the market-place, and was told that in the morning three forest rovers were to be hung thereon.

Having obtained this information, Robin betook

himself to the forest again, and held consultation with his leaders, as to what plan they should adopt for the rescue of the brothers. They were not long in deciding; and then Robin, Alan, Will, and Little John started off to the villages round about, to acquaint their trusty friends with the work that they had to do.

By night all arrangements were completed, and the leaders met again in the Greenwood Glade. Unfortunately, Little John met with an accident as he was returning to the forest. He had had an awkward fall, and one leg was so severely swollen in the morning, that it was resolved to leave him behind.

The poor old woman had been warmly welcomed by Marian and Ellen; but all they said could not console her, and it was with considerable difficulty that they persuaded her to remain with them, her desire to see her sons was so strong. But Robin vowed so solemnly that they should return with him that day, that she at last consented to remain behind.

There was a great stir in Nottingham to see the execution. Some had said that it was Robin Hood and two of his men that had been caught, and threats not a few were made use of, in case this was found out to be true.

Robin, soon after daybreak, started for the town. On his way he met a beggar, who wore a cloak patched with black, blue, and red.

Robin accosted him, when the beggar said there

was a sight to be seen in Nottingham that day, and he was running away because the sheriff had wanted him to be his executioner. This was capital news for Robin, who at once proposed that they should exchange garments. The man hesitated at first, believing that Robin was only making fun of him; but when Robin pulled out of his pocket some money, which he said he would give the man to boot, he saw that Robin was in earnest, and was not long in stripping off his clothes, which Robin immediately assumed; and they parted, each apparently well pleased with his bargain.

Robin hurried on to Nottingham, the streets of which he found filled with people, and everybody discussing the merits of the execution that was to take place. A cry was raised of "Hangman!" followed by some hisses, which caused Robin to turn his head, and, to his astonishment, he found that he was the object of the people's shout, and that a crowd was gathering at his heels. He walked as quickly as he could through the town towards the sheriff's house. The hour fixed for the execution had not yet arrived, but Robin met the sheriff riding on horseback, followed by a number of his men, all armed with spears, on their way to the jail. On catching sight of Robin, the sheriff called out,—

"Well, wilt thou be hangman to-day?"

Robin nodded assent.

"It is well," said the sheriff; "thou hast saved me some trouble. But I'm afraid you'll have to look

sharp after the suits, that they be not torn after the hanging."

Robin shook his head and laughed.

"Well, if they are torn, I'll make it up to thee. Thirteenpence," the sheriff added, as though he was contemplating some bargain,—"'twill be a good day's work for thee."

On seeing the sheriff, the people slunk away. Robin fell into the procession immediately behind the sheriff. When they came to the prison, the sheriff and Robin entered, leaving the remainder outside. The three condemned men were pacing their cell as the sheriff entered, nothing daunted at the prospect of an immediate death.

"Has our mother come?" asked Jolly, the youngest.

"Thou dost not want thy mother here," the sheriff replied; "you'd best think of the strange journey you're about to make."

"There's one consolation," said Jaunty, "the sheriff must die one day, and," he added, in a loud whisper, "maybe a rover's hand will speed him on the way."

The sheriff started as the man spoke, and then signalled Robin to bind them. This Robin immediately proceeded to do, and in the operation managed to whisper into the ear of one of them, "All's right; Robin will be here." Before they left the cell, Jerry asked, as a last favour, that they might be allowed to be alone for a minute. This request was granted, and Jerry took the opportunity of com-

municating to his brothers the words whispered in his ear.

When the time was up, the cell door was again opened, and the men were led out and placed in a low cart, where they knelt down, and the cart moved on, surrounded by the sheriff's spearmen.

There was a great crowd of people in the streets, and many ill words were shouted at the sheriff as he rode along. At length they came in sight of the gallows, against which there was reared a ladder, and from the centre beam there hung three noosed ropes.

Robin cast a searching glance amongst the crowd as the cart stopped, and, to his joy, he recognised Will and Alan, and thereby knew the force that he relied on was at hand.

The spearmen were ordered to clear a space around the gallows, the sheriff riding about to see that proper order was kept. The open space was some time in forming; but at length it was made, and the sheriff called out,—

“Now, hangman, waste no time.”

The hangman, however, had been busily engaged, while the sheriff was looking after his men, in quietly severing the bonds of the brothers, who, in obedience to Robin's injunction, still knelt down in the cart.

On hearing the sheriff's order, Robin sprang up nimbly. The sheriff looked at him, and turned livid with rage.

Robin held a sword in his hand, which he was

brandishing over his head. The three brothers were up, with their arms loose, and standing back to back.

"Who's on Robin Hood's side?" shouted Robin.

In an instant there was a roar of voices ; the slender barrier of spearmen that separated the people from the gallows was broken, the people seized the spears from the men's hands, and arming themselves, struck right and left amongst the Normans.

At the same time, Robin's men, numbering some fifty, pressed forward to where Robin and the brothers now stood, hemmed in by friends and foes. They had leaped down from the cart at Robin's bidding, but, the next moment, were in danger of their lives by the press of people. Some of Robin's men thrust a sword into each brother's hand, which they wielded with a vigour inspired by their love of life.

The sheriff was seized, and would have been dragged off his horse, but was saved by the plunging of the animal, which, frightened by the noise, reared and kicked savagely. Taking advantage of his horse's restiveness, he dashed through the crowd, nor stopped to look behind him until he had reached his house.

"I do verily believe," he said to his wife, "that the devil is in Robin Hood ; he's in Nottingham again to-day, and has rescued the prisoners."

The fight continued in the streets, and it was with difficulty that Robin and his fellows got clear of the crowd. Then they made a dash for the nearest gate, and fought their way out into the open country. The tumult in the town lasted for a considerable time ;

and many broken heads and aching sides were the result of the sheriff's attempt to hang the three rovers.

Robin dispersed his band on getting into the forest, taking with him the three brothers whose lives he had so bravely saved.

Old Dame Cobble, when she saw them again, fell on their necks and embraced them, one after the other, without a word ; her tears fell too fast, and her joy was too great, to permit of her tongue speaking. She remained with them in the forest for several years ; and at length died in a good old age, and was buried under an old oak-tree.

A few weeks after what was ironically called "the Nottingham execution," Robin received intelligence from the Dale that the Bishop of Hereford was expected at the abbey, to complete the transfer of land to Abbot Scaregrace. The abbot, after a good deal of manœuvring, had induced the bishop to consent to the transfer of the land to Dale Abbey, on payment to him of £300. A time had been appointed for the signing of the necessary deeds, and the bishop left Hereford with a large retinue to go to the abbey.

His lordship, remembering the very unpleasant nature of the charges that had been made against him, now brought with him a full train, in order to make an impression in the village and amongst the brethren of the abbey.

For several days before the arrival of the bishop, servants sent in advance rode into the village richly dressed. The bishop himself at last came with his

immediate attendants. They had journeyed through the forest in the order that best suited their convenience; but, on nearing the village, a procession was formed. There walked first the servants of the household, two and two, each one carrying the emblem of his office, then came dignified members of the bishop's staff riding on horses; the steward, carrying a large key, symbolical of his stewardship; the leech, holding in his hand what would now be called a barber's pole; monks with inkhorns at their side; retainers armed with spears and bows; and, last of all, the bishop himself, carried on the shoulders of eight men. A long way in the rear were a number of packhorses, laden with all sorts of good things for the use and enjoyment of the travellers on their journey.

Down the valley the proud cortege progressed with stately step and manifest importance, while the poor people stood on the roads with gaping mouths and wondering eyes. On their way to the abbey they passed the church, the sight of which sent a shudder through the bishop's frame, reminding him, as it did, of the incidents of his previous visit to the place. At last they reached the abbey, and in the courtyard found the abbot, surrounded by his monks and all the subordinate members of his household, standing to receive the bishop with due ceremony. The bishop descended from the elevated seat on which he rode, and was embraced by the abbot. After exchanging sundry compliments, they passed into the abbey to partake of refreshments.

Three days passed in ceremonies and entertainments, at the end of which they fell to business, and the coveted land was legally transferred to the abbot and his successors for ever.

The abbot directed his steward to count the money in the presence of the bishop. £300, in good gold, was counted out and tied up in sundry bags, which were forthwith transferred to the bishop's travelling-case. Another day was spent convivially, on which occasion Baron de Younglove was invited to meet the bishop, and then the bishop made preparations to return.

These preliminaries occupied another day. Flesh-meat had to be obtained, cooked, and packed on the horses, for consumption on the way home. Good bread had to be baked, and wine and ale delivered in casks. While the masters had been exchanging civilities, the servants had also been fraternising; and the respective cooks of the two establishments had so far advanced in favour with each other, as to barter sundry recipes. One consequence of this was, that the provisions furnished for the bishop's use on his return journey were prepared with more than usual care, and were more than usually good. At length the day of parting came, and, while farewells were being interchanged, Robin was preparing a reception for the bishop, of which that exalted personage was little aware.

The fullest information of all that had been going on at the abbey was carried to Robin by his friends in the village. He summoned his men from the

bordering villages to meet him in the forest, where they were fully instructed what course they were to pursue.

Robin and six of his men dressed themselves like shepherds, and repaired to that part of the forest through which the bishop was expected to pass. In several other directions men were posted to observe which way the bishop entered the forest, and report accordingly.

Robin set his companions to kindle a fire in the roadway, while he shot a fat buck. A haunch was then severed, spitted, and fixed over a fire to roast. While this was going on, a scout arrived with the intelligence that the bishop was advancing by the road that had been anticipated, and would be at the spot where Robin was in the course of two hours. Robin immediately gave orders for the concentration of his men in that neighbourhood, and directed that on the sound of his horn they should come running from four different points, so as to enclose the bishop and his men on all sides.

This was quietly arranged by Will, Alan, Friar Tuck, and Little John, who brought their men up, and secreted them amongst the trees to await the signal.

Onward came the bishop and his party, discoursing merrily on the entertainment they had received at the hands of Abbot Scaregrace. When they were yet a quarter of a mile away from Robin's temporary head-quarters, the bishop's cook scented the air, and declared that he smelt roast venison. The bishop

ordered an immediate halt, but no one save the cook could distinguish the smell. After they had proceeded some distance further, however, the odour became stronger, and several of the household corroborated the cook's statement. At length the bishop was convinced by his own nose, and, with a sharpened appetite, he ordered the whole party to press forward.

"If," said the bishop, "it is as I suspect, we shall find some of those forest rovers that infest these parts—perchance it may be Robin Hood himself—roasting some venison; but we'll disappoint them of their dinner, save our own victuals, and carry the rogues prisoners to Nottingham."

Without a word being spoken, they quickened their pace until they came in sight of Robin and the six men he had disguised, tending the fire and the venison. The shepherds pretended not to see the bishop, but kept their backs towards him until he was close upon them. They then started up, and made as though they would have gone off into the forest; but were prevented from doing so by several of the bishop's servants, whom they allowed to get before them and cut off their retreat.

"Ho, ho!" exclaimed the bishop, when the men were brought back, "I've caught you nicely."

To which Robin replied, "Ha, ha! my dear bishop, don't be too sure of that."

"Dost thou treat me with scorn?" the bishop said; "verily I'll cut thy ears off, and hang thee afterwards. But answer me, sirrah! what do you mean by roasting the king's venison here?"

"We mean to eat it, if you'll let us," Robin replied.

"Saucy knave!" exclaimed the bishop, "this will be the last of the king's deer that you shoot."

Then turning to the other prisoners, he said, "You fellows have a monster roast, methinks, for so small a company."

"May it please your grace," said Robin, "we expected you to dine with us; and knowing you and your train had good appetites, we made ready accordingly."

"Your dinner, knave," said the bishop angrily, "you shall eat in Nottingham Jail."

"Nay, pardon, pardon!" Robin exclaimed, falling upon his knees, an example followed by his companions.

"No pardon," the bishop replied; "therefore prepare to come with me."

"Not I," said Robin, springing up as he spoke, and setting his back against a tree.

"Bind that villain!" the bishop shouted; but before his men could get a rope from off the pack-horse, Robin had blown a loud blast upon his horn.

There was an acknowledging shout heard in the forest, followed by a noise amongst the trees and brushwood; and in a few minutes the bishop and his whole train found themselves surrounded by men, all dressed alike in Lincoln green, and carrying bows in their hands. In the surprise this created, Robin and his six fellows threw off their shepherds' dress, and appeared in costume similar to the others.

"Do not let one escape," Robin called out ; "these are my friends, who are going to dine with me to-day."

Little John advanced to Robin, and, making a bow, asked him whether they should bind the bishop and his train.

"Bind them !" responded Robin ; "why, this proud bishop says that, having caught us in the very act, we shall have no pardon, but that he will carry us all to Nottingham."

"Cut off his head !" Little John replied ; "let us not have any bishop lording over us."

"Oh, pardon, pardon !" the bishop cried, descending from his horse, and advancing towards Robin ; "grant me pardon, I pray thee ; for had I known thou hadst been here, I would gladly have gone some other way."

"But thou couldst not have escaped me," Robin rejoined, "for my men were watching every movement of yours. I have a long reckoning to make with you, on account of a broken vow which you took in Dale Church, at a wedding that you may perhaps remember ; and some further claims in respect of a certain special licence to marry given to Baron de Younglove ; besides a slight reckoning for an absolution granted to the baron from observing his vow."

"Nay then, if thou judgest thus, I am lost and undone," the bishop exclaimed.

While Robin was conversing with the bishop, the members of his train stood in a crowd together,

frightened almost out of their wits at the appearance of Robin's men, an account of whose deeds, with many exaggerations, had been told them at Dale Abbey.

Robin ordered the bishop and his men to follow him into the forest. Four of them were ordered to carry the spit on which the venison was roasting; and Robin's men drove the remainder before them. The packhorses were taken in charge by some of the rovers.

They all proceeded some distance, until they came upon the Glade, where the baron was entertained, and there they came upon the preparations for a feast.

Robin introduced the bishop to Marian and Ellen, who welcomed him right warmly, telling him that they had been waiting for him to come and dine for more than an hour.

The bishop found, to his surprise, that there was an abundance of good cheer, and no lack even of wine. His appetite, however, had been considerably diminished by the reminders that Robin had given him of former delinquencies. When all was ready, Robin called upon Friar Tuck to say grace. Up rose that good man, and gave it in terms somewhat similar to those used at the baron's visit,—“What we are about to receive, the Bishop of Hereford pays for. So mote it be. Amen.”

The bishop, thinking it prudent to join in the humour, laughed at the friar's irreverence, as he called it, while the infection spread amongst the members of his train, till general laughter ensued,

The bishop seemed to regard the sentiment of the grace as a token of partial forgiveness, but cast an uneasy glance at the packhorse that carried his travelling-case. His followers ate and drank heartily, seemingly little concerned about their master's trouble.

After the meal had been despatched, Robin mounted one of the horses, and made the bishop stand before him, while he recounted to all present how the bishop had broken faith with him.

"Master," said Little John, "hadn't we better settle the reckoning before we hang his reverence?"

A shout from Robin's men signified their assent. Will laid a cloak upon the ground, while Little John unbound the bishop's valise, and, cutting it open with his sword, emptied the money on the cloak. The whole of Robin's band sent up a loud shout on seeing the glittering heap; and, by the twinkle in Robin's eyes, the bishop saw that his life would yet be spared.

"Since the bishop is so kind as to give us this gold to pay the reckoning with, shall we in return spare him his life, notwithstanding it has been justly forfeited?" asked Robin.

A loud "Ay, ay," was the answer.

The bishop signified his ready assent to purchase his life on these terms.

Robin, however, was not willing to let him off without some punishment, so he declared that the bishop should give them a specimen of his dancing before he was allowed to depart.

Alan's harp being produced, the bishop was required to dance a solo. Up to this point some of his people had looked on what was passing around in silence, but when they actually saw their master begin to caper at the sound of Alan's harp, they lost all control of themselves, and laughed heartily. The steward and leech, thinking the bishop would expect some degree of decorum on their part, tried to keep themselves in check, by thrusting into their mouths, the one his key, and the other his coloured rod ; but all to no effect,—the laughter would come, and came accordingly. The bishop capered away as well as he was able, but catching his boot in his gown two or three times, Robin bade him fasten his gown in his waist-belt, or he would take it from him altogether. The bishop, obedient as a child, began to tuck up his gown as desired in his belt, continuing to dance all the while. He wore long riding-boots, which caused considerable amusement amongst Robin's men, as they had not seen the like before.

After dancing for about half an hour, Robin ordered the harper to cease, and the bishop fell exhausted on the ground. Robin brought some cold water, which he applied to the bishop's mouth, and he soon came round again. Looking Robin full in the face, he said,—

“Thou mayst shoot all the deer in Sherwood Forest, for what I care ; and if thou dost ever catch me in the future interfering with thee or thy men, I'll give thee leave to hang me.”

"That's a bargain," Robin exclaimed, "and all present are witnesses to it."

"Agreed upon," the bishop said.

The bishop and his train did not wait to be told twice to go; but, on Robin giving them leave, hurried off as fast as they could.





CHAPTER XIII.

Robin's Encounter with David of Doncaster—The Shooting Match at Nottingham—Robin carries off the Prize—The Sheriff's Stratagem—Capture of a notable Prisoner.

SUMMER and winter passed in quick succession, and still Robin Hood, with a band of men slowly increasing, lived at his house in Greenwood Glade. In the villages bordering on the forest, his scouts found the greatest difficulty in restraining the numbers who were ever ready to volunteer their services in any expedition that was afoot. The spirit of adventure was so strong within them, and the desire to have a fling at a Norman baron or bishop irrepressible. Besides this, no one that had served Robin came away empty-handed. In the winter-time there was but little opportunity for adventure; no wealthy barons or bishops ever undertook a journey then, and so the forest rovers had to seek amusement at home. There was, however, always something to be done.

In the winter of 1184-5, Robin and his men erected a second house, equal in dimensions to the first, and fortified it in the strongest possible manner. As the greater number of Robin's adventures happened in the spring, summer, and autumn months, there will be very little or nothing of interest to record of the winter.

The spring of 1185 set in unusually soon, and the great forest trees put forth their leaves very early. May-day was regarded as the opening day of the season, after which they might expect to meet travellers in the forest.

Before the expiration of April however, on one sunshiny day, Robin, Little John, and Alan started out, thinking they might perhaps meet with some variation to the monotony of the last few months. Robin vowed that his limbs were stiff for want of a real bout with a stranger, and declared that, if he had to go into Nottingham, he would not return without having exchanged blows with some one. He little thought, when he said this, that he would have such a tussle that day as he had never had before.

Forth the three went into the forest, amongst the flowers that scented the air with their fragrance, as if in gratitude to the sun for having called them so early that spring into existence. Through glades, beside gentle rivulets, up hill-sides they went, until they came to the great high-road that ran through the very heart of the forest to Nottingham.

As they walked, they told droll stories of adventures in former years. At length they heard, in the dis-

tance, a voice singing, and immediately Little John and Alan were ordered to conceal themselves, and Robin paced slowly along the road, awaiting the stranger.

He came in sight, still chanting his song, and swinging about his head a long oaken staff he had in his hand, as if beating time to his tune ; but on seeing Robin in the distance, he ceased his singing, and when he came up to him, he besought charity. He was dressed in the garb of a beggar, wore a long gray cloak, which was torn in many places, and had several empty bags hanging round his person.

Robin, in reply to his request, told him he had no money for idlers,—that men like him, who were lusty and begged their bread, ought to be beaten by every person from whom they asked alms. At the same time, Robin twisted about the oak staff which he carried, as though he was desirous of putting his theory into practice.

The beggar looked hard at Robin, on receiving so curt an answer, and boldly invited him at once to try his hand at what he had suggested.

Robin, nothing loath, signified his readiness to do so, and both men immediately prepared for the contest. Robin threw off his cap and doublet of green, and the beggar his bags and his gown.

Then, with staves in hand, they approached and stood face to face with each other.

“Play!” exclaimed the beggar. And forthwith Robin threw himself into position, and struck out with his staff. He was, however, at a disadvantage with





the beggar, and received a hearty cut over his head to begin with. Again and again the beggar repeated his doses, and bestowed three blows on Robin to one in exchange; and the beggar's blows were given with such hearty effect as to draw blood. At length Robin, seeing that he was no match for his antagonist, cried "Quarter," and threw down his staff.

Up rose Little John and Alan from the place of their concealment, whence they had seen the battle, and the beggar stared to see two more men dressed like his opponent.

"Never fear," Robin exclaimed; "my fellows will never harm such a brave fellow as thou art."

"Master," said the beggar, looking hard at Robin, "I begin to suspect that thou art Robin Hood."

"Thou art right," Robin replied; "and if thou wilt join my band, thou shalt have good suits of Lincoln green, plenty of good cheer, share and share of gold; and we will teach thee as much cunning with the bow as thou hast with the quarterstaff."

"Hast thou forgotten me?" said Little John; "methinks a good suit hast changed me mightily, if thou dost not remember the strokes thou once gavest at Doncaster to Little John."

"Nay, verily," exclaimed the beggar; "but art thou—yea, thy size declarest thou art—the very same with whom I fought at Doncaster? 'Twas well my blows were good," he continued; "but they were poor acknowledgments of the back fall thou once gavest me at the fair."

"Ah, ah, ah!" roared Little John.

"I'll join you, good master," the beggar said, "if thou'lt forgive the blows I've given thee; but had I only known thy name, thou shouldst never have said David of Doncaster ever struck Robin Hood."

"'Twas my fault," Robin said, "and I hope it will not be the last bout I have with thee; but sloth hath stiffened my joints rarely."

"I hope," the beggar remarked, "that thy skill in shooting is not impaired, or else thou wilt lose a noble prize that the Sheriff of Nottingham has offered for the best shot. I should be sorry to hear that Robin Hood had been beaten by any man with the bow."

"What is this same prize of which thou speakest?" Robin asked.

"An arrow of silver, with a golden head."

"That arrow shall be mine, or I vow I'll never shoot again."

Little John held up his hand in solemn protestation against Robin's vow.

"It is too, too rash," he said.

"Nay," quoth Robin; "I'm as safe in Nottingham now as in Greenwood Glade, and would go there alone any day."

"Thou art too hasty," Alan said seriously; "were we to lose thee, we should all be scattered."

"I shall survive all of you, I fear," Robin replied; "but enough of these idle fears; let us return and make out some plan to carry off this arrow; but it shall be fairly won, ye mark."

They forthwith retraced their steps through the forest, David of Doncaster accompanying them. He

was introduced to the rest of the band as a brave hand with a quarterstaff.

Said Marian, when Robin threw himself down to have the blood-stains washed from his head, "I wish discretion had been knocked into thy pate; for thou art ever thrusting thyself forward to get blows, and thy fellows complain that thou wilt have all and not let them share."

Quoth Robin, "If any one complains, I'll do my heartiest to give him a few of the surplus blows I got to-day."

"Nay, nay," Marian exclaimed, in softest accents; "but thou dost not care for me, when thou shewest such an anxiety to take blows from everybody."

"Thou hast forgotten," Robin replied, "that I ran most danger of all in thy company at Gamewell Halk. A few odd blows at a venture from a single man are naught. But dost thou doubt I love thee?"

Marian—well, it is not of very much importance what Marian both said and did; suffice it to say, that Robin's query was answered in a way that was perfectly satisfactory to him.

In talking over the coming match, David informed Robin that it was fixed to take place in a fortnight.

Robin's household friends were all most unwilling that he should go alone, and several proposed to accompany him in case of danger. This he at first refused; but some of his scouts from Nottingham brought him word that the shooting match was for no other purpose than to take him prisoner, and warned him not to come. To be present Robin was deter-

mined, and he reluctantly consented to allow a number of his men to accompany him.

The information about the match, carried to Robin from Nottingham, was, indeed, the true version of the affair.

The sheriff had been puzzling his brains for a long time how he should capture his obnoxious enemy; and after mature deliberation, came to the conclusion that, if he ever succeeded in taking him, it would only be by stratagem. Accordingly, he gave out that he would hold the grand shooting match, of which mention has been made.

In the villages for many miles round, he caused the match to be proclaimed; and this had the effect of bringing together a far greater number of archers and spectators than the sheriff had anticipated. The arrow was hung out of one of the sheriff's front windows for several days before the match.

As the day drew nigh, the sheriff chose five men, to whom he had confided the secret purpose he had in view. These five chose ten men apiece, to assist them in the work they had in hand. The night before the affair was to come off, these men took quiet possession of two houses near the spot where the butts were erected.

At length the morning came, and the interest shewn in the contest was evidenced by the numbers that poured into the town from the country. The inhabitants of both quarters of the town also turned out; and the great square where the contest was to take place was crowded with people.

When the sheriff arrived there, he found several

thousand men, women, and children assembled together. There were nearly one hundred men congregated together, with bows in their hands and quivers at their backs, ready to take part in the day's proceedings.

The sheriff, in ranging these in line, scanned their faces narrowly, but could not find one answering his remembrance of Robin. The majority of the men wore the dress of peasants—a loose-skirted blouse, fastened with a belt round the waist. Others were foresters; and these there was not much difficulty in seeing were Normans.

At length the shooting commenced, and the sheriff gravely doubted whether Robin was among the number. As each archer shot, the sheriff examined his features; and the majority had each shot once, without anything happening that gave the sheriff the slightest clue to what he was so anxious to know.

One of the few remaining, whose arrow struck the centre of the butt, exclaimed, "Well done, Robin!" not loud, but in an undertone, as though he was thinking aloud. The sheriff's suspicions were immediately aroused; he walked in front of the men, and stared the archer in the face. The man appeared uneasy, and his face fell under the searching glance of the sheriff. There was evidently something wrong about the man. He wore the dress of a Norman labourer, and that fact seemed to confirm the sheriff in his suspicion. In his cap was a raven's feather. At length all the archers had shot once, and the man who wore the raven's feather was the best shot.

A number of the archers fell out after the first round, and immediately the shooting recommenced. This time the man with the raven's feather shot badly; he was evidently unnerved. As he retired, one, who wore the dress of a Norman, whispered something in his ear, and the sheriff, who was on the alert, heard him reply, "I shall lose it now purposely, or else he'll find me out."

The sheriff was now confirmed in his suspicions. This man, who had so cleverly disguised himself in the garb of a Norman, could be no other than Robin Hood.

Immediately he sent a messenger to the houses where his men were posted, to prepare to come as soon as the people began to shout loudly; "And then," said the sheriff, "let them seize the man who wears the raven's feather in his cap."

Meanwhile the match proceeded. A third and a fourth round had been fired; the suspected outlaw still kept his place amongst the best shots; but he seemed to be shooting purposely somewhat wide of the mark.

The excitement in the crowd of spectators was increasing fast. There were only four archers shooting now. One wore a gray goose-quill in his cap; the second, a peacock's feather; the third, a red cock's feather; and the fourth, the raven's feather. Loud shouts were raised by the people, as they backed their favourites. "Now for the goose-quill!" "My belt on the peacock's feather!" "Black feather's the man!" "The red, the red,—he's won!"

This was shouted, as a man who wore the red feather, the last of the four, sent an arrow into the very heart of the target. The black feather was beaten by half the length of an arrow. No time was to be lost; the sheriff, amid loud cheers from all assembled, handed the much coveted arrow to the man who wore the red feather. These loud shouts was the signal agreed upon between the sheriff and his concealed men.

To the astonishment of many, the doors of two houses on opposite sides of the street were thrown open, and a body of men, armed with short swords, ran out. The people screamed as the men, in forcing their way through the crowd, beat them savagely with the flat of the sword on their heads and shoulders. Through the crowd they forced themselves, with considerable difficulty, to where the archers stood. The man who wore the red feather, on receiving the prize, had been hoisted on to the shoulders of some stout friends in the crowd, who were on the point of carrying him through the streets in triumph when the tumult began.

As though in expectation of an assault being made upon him, he was seen to leap down lightly from off the shoulders of his friends, who immediately made a circle round him, and, drawing short swords from beneath their dresses, they commenced working their way through the crowd. This was comparatively an easy matter, because they made off in the direction in which the crowd was running. There were shouts amongst the people for the sheriff, but he was no-

where to be seen, having secreted himself in a house as soon as the tumult began.

The men who had been posted in the houses, on receiving the sheriff's message, had peeped out of the corners of the windows, and through chinks in the doors, to see the man whom the sheriff indicated. They watched the sheriff's messenger return from communicating his directions to them, and post himself, as agreed upon, behind the supposed outlaw, whose raven feather was a conspicuous object. The moment that the prize was awarded, the black feather, or raven,—as we shall call him,—thrust himself into the crowd, as though he would have made off; but was seized by the sheriff's messenger with more pluck than discretion, for the raven turned quickly round and struck him a heavy blow in the face.

There was raised the cry of "A fight! a fight!" and a circle was instantly formed, in the centre of which the two men stood face to face, unable to stir. At this moment it was that the sheriff's men burst out of the houses in which they had been concealed, and commenced fighting their way through the crowd. The utmost confusion prevailed.

The people, unable to comprehend the attack from three separate quarters,—for red cock's seemed almost like an attack,—did what they always do under the influence of terror—made a great uproar. Women screamed, and the men shouted. Fierce blows were given; and people thrown down, trampled upon, and hurt very seriously. Above the shouting and screaming of the terrified people, was heard the clash of

swords. Some in the throng, not knowing what was the matter, had drawn their swords and opposed themselves to the furious onslaught made by the sheriff's two forces as they pushed into the very thickest of the throng.

Round about the two combatants, who stood with fists squared at each other, pressed the people, anxious to escape the blows of the Norman swords. The terror and confusion that was created contributed to effect the sheriff's purpose. One column of men reached the circle that still swayed about, with the black feather and his opponent in the centre. The next moment they laid hold of black feather with loud shouts.

The man was evidently astonished at being so unceremoniously seized. He struggled fiercely to escape, but was overpowered by numbers. He then shouted, at the top of his voice, "Foresters, to the rescue, rescue!" a loud shout was the response, and then, from amongst the crowd that still thronged the place, there were twenty swords raised and brandished in the air.

At this time the second force belonging to the sheriff joined the first. They immediately moved forward in the direction of the jail, but found themselves suddenly opposed from an unexpected quarter. To the rallying cry of "Rescue! rescue!" the twenty men, armed with swords, threw themselves against the sheriff's men.

Norman was opposed to Norman. Swords were used with fatal effect, and men on both sides fell wounded to the ground.

In the course of this fresh contest, the unarmed spectators of the shooting match managed to get clear off, and the open street was now occupied solely by the sheriff's men, with their prisoner, and the foresters who were attempting his rescue. The people watched the affray from the doorways and windows of the houses, perplexed beyond measure at what was going on.

The contest waged for more than an hour; and many of the men, bleeding from wounds they had received, staggered to the nearest homes and begged shelter,—a request which was in no instance refused by the kind-hearted Saxons.

At length the main body of the sheriff's men, who had kept well together, managed to shake off the friends of their prisoner, and they proceeded along the street to the jail, where they finally lodged the unfortunate raven. A few of their number were left, keeping the foresters in check; and as soon as the chief prisoner was safe, the men returned, and, with the assistance of their comrades, six more were ultimately secured.

As soon as the fighting was over, a great crowd assembled about the jail, with a view to find out what had been the cause of the tumult, and who the prisoners were that had been taken.

After lodging their additional prisoners in the jail, the sheriff's men formed in procession, and walked up the streets to the sheriff's residence, with loud shouts, waving their swords over their heads, as though they had achieved a great victory.

There were left of their number no fewer than three dead in the streets, while four of their opponents had been slain. Besides these, a large number, who had been wounded, were lodged in the Saxons' houses ; so that the men had some reason to think proudly of the contest in which they had been engaged, and the notable prisoner they had taken.

The sheriff was very serious, when they told him the result of the contest ; nevertheless, he was considerably elated at the success that had attended his plot.

"The king shall know of your deeds," he said, "for you have rid the whole country of a scourge. You shall have ten shillings apiece from me, and be made freemen of the town. As for Robin Hood, I'll hang him to-morrow morning before his men can reach the town. The other prisoners may get off with the loss of their ears."

"The black feather was furious when he saw himself surrounded," the man said who had acted as the sheriff's messenger to those in concealment.

"Ah, ah, ah!" laughed those who had managed to get off without wounds. The sheriff paid them the amount agreed upon for their service, and they remained talking over the incidents of the day's adventure.

Meanwhile we shall follow the adventures of the red feather and his party. They were very much alarmed at first, on seeing two formidable bodies of armed men issuing out of the houses. They succeeded, however, in getting clear of the crowd ;

and saw, as they fled along the streets, that the armed men remained in the centre of the throng, and that some serious fighting was going on.

At length, in small parties, they got clear of the town, and joined each other in the forest. The man who had worn the red feather was no other than Robin Hood, who had carried out his resolution, and, together with a number of his men, attended the shooting. When they all met in the forest, the extraordinary attack made upon the people became the subject of their conversation; but no one could suggest the probable meaning of the affray.

Said Robin, "My only wish is now to let the sheriff know that I have got his prize, but how to accomplish this is a difficult question."

No one volunteered to carry a message of the kind for Robin, nor would he have allowed it, because it would only have been sending the messenger to the gallows.

At length Alan suggested that a letter should be written, and fastened to an arrow. This met with the approbation of all. Alan was the only one who could write, and, fortunately, he had with him materials sufficient to carry out his own proposition. So he wrote on the spare leaf of an old missal these words:—"Your gold and silver arrow is now in the quiver of Robin Hood, the archer with the red feather." This was folded up, and on the outside was written, "To the Sheriff."

This Robin fastened to the head of one of his

arrows, and returning to the walls of Nottingham, he shot the arrow into the town.

At this very moment the sheriff, accompanied by his men, was on his way to the jail, and while passing the spot where the affray commenced, an arrow, with something tied to the head, fell at his feet. He started as though he had been shot. One of his men picked the weapon up; the point was blunted, and fastened to the head was a parchment leaf, with some writing on it. There was no one in all the company present who could make out what was written.

The sheriff sent a messenger to the nearest monastic establishment for a learned monk. On his arrival, he read the writing aloud, to the intense surprise of all present.

Some laughed, and said it was only a trick to save the prisoner's life, and recommended the sheriff to hang the chief prisoner forthwith, for fear of some attempt at rescue being made.

The sheriff, however, had his own private reasons for suspecting that, after all, some inexplicable blunder had again been made, and that his enemy had escaped him.

Who could the prisoner be? This question could only be solved at the jail.

On arriving there, they found men at work erecting a gallows directly in front of the jail door. On seeing his visitor, the jailer threw open the door to admit him.

The prisoners were all confined in separate cells,

that they might the more easily be got at for punishment.

The sheriff spoke to each as he passed them, saying, in an encouraging tone of voice, that they would never more roam the forest, committing such depredations as they had upon the king's deer. Some of the men replied by threatening the vengeance of the king upon the sheriff and all connected with him for what he had done. At last, in the innermost cell, the sheriff found the prisoner for whom so many lives had been lost that day. The door grated harshly on its old-fashioned hinges, as it was thrown open.

The prisoner was pacing the floor, evidently much excited; but, on hearing the door opening, he stopped, and gazed upon his visitors.

The sheriff, on seeing his prisoner, started back with amazement, exclaiming, "Gruff, as I'm a sinner!"

The man addressed replied, "Gammer, you've treated me badly, and the king shall know."

The prisoner was indeed no other than Gruff, who, anxious to surprise the sheriff with his skill in using the bow, had tried to hide his face from recognition, and so had thus excited the suspicions that he was none other than the renowned Robin Hood.





CHAPTER XIV.

Little John and the Brothers Cobble go in search of an Adventure—
Marian, Ellen, and the Friar play them a Trick—Little John and
his Companions are twice beaten.



AMONGST those left behind in the forest with Marian and Ellen, were the three brothers, Jerry, Jaunty, and Jolly Cobble, Little John, and Friar Tuck.

After Robin and his party had left, the three brothers and Little John made it up amongst themselves to go into the forest in search of an adventure on their own account. The friar was asked to accompany them; but Marian objected to his leaving, as she observed that they wanted him at home to say grace at dinner. The friar was too much of a lady's-man to act contrary to her wishes, and so he remained behind.

As soon as the others had gone, Marian called Ellen and the friar.

"I've a scheme in my head," she said, "to try the mettle of these four men, and I want you two to help

me in it. First, we must stain our cheeks, and then disguise ourselves like beggars; and while we are walking in the forest, I'll tell you what I propose doing."

Ellen readily consented to join Marian, and the friar expressed his perfect willingness to accompany them, to protect them from harm; because he declared that two women could not keep out of harm's way unless they were restrained by the presence of one man at least.

Ellen said that, whatever mischief they got into, they would get themselves out of, and would share between them all the blows that befell the party, without asking him to take any.

The friar vowed that, in the way of blows, he could bear as much as any single member of Robin's company; the only punishment he very seriously objected to was fasting, which was an invention of the evil one, he believed, to plague honest souls.

They laughed heartily at the friar's candid confession.

Marian promised him that there should be no fasting for him that day, though there might be some journeying.

Then they stained their cheeks, until they were as brown as a hazel-nut, and over their clothes they put on beggar's tattered garbs. Round their necks they each strung three bags, two of which were empty, and the third filled with meal.

The friar protested against carrying so many empty bags, and persuaded Marian to fill two with provisions

for the day, while he carried a couple of bottles of wine in each of his two bags, and filled the third with meal.

Thus they carried amongst them each a bag of meal, Marian and Ellen two bags of provisions, and the friar four bottles of wine. Slouched hats concealed half their features, and, with stout oaken staves in their hands, they sallied forth with much merry laughter to meet with the four who had preceded them in search of an adventure.

There was a pleasant breeze blowing, which played among the leaves, and was laden with the scents of the flowers. The sweetest and most soothing of all music is that of a gentle wind in a warm spring-time amongst the fresh leaves of the trees. •

Through the forest for miles Marian and her companions wandered over the mossy turf, down slopes that were covered with the nodding bluebell, or amongst acres of wild geraniums, and that pretty flower since called the forget-me-not. Through little laughing streams they paddled, scorning the stepping-stones, standing in the centre several minutes while the water cooled their feet and ankles. Then up the sides of some pretty mound, the summit of which, covered with beautiful trees, screened them from the sun. And again they pursued their way, one moment crossing a patch in the sunlight, and presently shaded by the trees. Still proceeding, they passed over a plain, where the ground gently undulated, like the waves of the sea at the coming in of the tide in the quiet of a summer evening. Then down other flower-

spread slopes, smelling sweeter and more refreshing than the sweetest of all perfumes extracted by a leech's art from the flower itself. There were wild deer, too, that they disturbed in their lair, which hastily bounded away in fear; and wild swans, that bent their necks with grace, and threatened personal violence; and hares, that started up from the shade of the yellow gorse, and were lost to sight in a moment; or a fox, that stole away swiftly with brush erect. These were the sounds, and scents, and scenes they enjoyed as they rambled on in strange disguise, intent on having a frolic.

The brothers Cobble and Little John, having had the start of Marian's party, reached the high-road first by two hours. They had enjoyed their ramble through the forest as much in their way as Marian and her friends had in another. Tired out with the walk, however, when they reached the high-road they all lay down by the side of it and slept.

While they thus slept, there came up a party of beggars on their way to Nottingham. There were five of them in all, and they had been amusing each other by telling stories, true and exaggerated, of their adventures and misadventures. Two of these men carried thick wooden legs under their arms, by strapping which to the knee, and doubling up the limb, they counterfeited lameness. They saw with much surprise the four men sleeping by the way-side, and going near, scanned their figures with the view of getting some clue to their occupation.

Seeing nothing near them but thick oaken staves,

they concluded rightly that they were forest rovers, and had come out to levy toll on the travellers.

With one assent the five men drew the four staves from the sides of the sleeping men, and threw them into the forest. They then shouted, at the top of their voices, "Thieves! thieves!" which roused the sleepers in an instant; but the moment they started up, they were knocked down again by well-aimed blows from the oak staves that the beggars carried.

Over Little John stood two men, as from his size they judged he would be the most awkward of the lot to deal with. They were wide awake with the first blow they received, and instinctively threw out their hands to grasp their staves, a movement which drew a hearty laugh from the beggars.

"Who are you? What are you? What do you want here?" inquired the spokesman of the beggars, one of the two carrying a false leg.

"We are three poor fellows who have just escaped," Jerry began, believing that the men standing before him formed part of a dream he had been having, in which he had been going over again the incidents of their escape from the gallows. But Jolly stopped his brother with a nudge in his ribs.

"Why, how say you that you are three, when there are four of you?" pursued the interrogator. "You are four dishonest varlets, who prowl about this forest, killing the king's deer and robbing the king's subjects."

He was stopped from saying more by a rapid and clever movement executed by Jaunty, opposite whom he stood, who, taking advantage of his head being

turned half from him, seized him suddenly by the legs with both arms, and with a sharp jerk gave him a back somersault. Before the man could rise, Jaunty stood over him with fists clenched, threatening punishment with his hands if he stirred. The other three took advantage of the diversion created in their favour by Jaunty, and succeeded in getting upon their legs, but not before they had received some severe blows about the head and face. Little John, following somewhat the style of attack initiated by Jaunty, suddenly threw out one of his legs and upset both the beggars who stood over him; and before they could rise, he was on his feet, and had armed himself with the wooden leg which one of them had dropped in falling.

The two men who had paid undivided attention to Little John, very quickly sprang to their legs again, but kept a respectful distance from the giant, who swung his singular weapon round his head, and invited both to come on at once. They declined the proffered honour, by dodging about out of his reach, so that Little John, though armed, was unable to assist at that moment any of his companions.

The three brothers had managed to get on their legs, and, in a scuffle which followed, Jaunty was thrown on the top of his man, upon which they grasped each other round the necks with one hand, and pommelled away at each other with the remaining hand, twisting about, and turning over and over each other on the ground.

Jerry and Jolly attempted to seize their opponents

and wrestle with them, but before they succeeded were very roughly treated by the sticks of their opponents.

Little John bore with considerable patience the dodging about of his two opponents for some minutes, but seeing that they made no advance, and knowing that there was hot work going on near him, ultimately made a sudden dash, and chased the two beggars for some distance, they running with considerable agility from him.

He let the space between them increase, so that before they had time to come back, Little John had gone round and given the other three beggars such a tap, each on the top of the head, as induced them to shew symptoms of having had enough of it.

Nor were the brothers and Little John a whit displeased when the beggars ran off as fast as their legs could carry them, leaving behind them the two false legs in the possession of the enemy. When the beggars had gone, Little John, crossing the road, found the staves that the beggars had thrown away.

For some time after they were left alone, the brothers and Little John were employed in examining the several wounds that they had received. The faces of the four were much swollen from the effects of the first tap they received on starting up from sleep, and subsequent blows, from hard fists as well as sticks, had contributed in a very great degree to increase the evil effects produced by the first. Their faces were swollen to a degree that was almost comical in its expression. Little John said there was

no remedy like cold water for a bruise, so they repaired to the nearest brook and bathed their faces for some time. Then they determined to make the best of their way home.

While they were yet on the highway, however, they discovered three more beggars, as they thought, who happened to be Marian and her companions—Ellen and Friar Tuck.

“Are these the same again?” inquired Jerry Cobble.

“I can’t tell,” responded Jolly; “I can’t see that far, my eye is so badly swollen. What do you say, Little John?”

After taking a good look, Little John assured them that they were not the same beggars. They were altogether differently dressed, and seemed to have something in the bags they carried about their necks.

“Then, after all,” said Jaunty, “we shall have something better than our faces to shew for our day’s labour.”

When the three beggars came near enough, Little John demanded that they should deliver up at once the bags they carried about their necks, and any money they might have about their persons.

The beggars stared hard at the men who thus opposed their passage, and at first appeared as though they had nothing to say, although they made no show of complying with the polite request.

The real fact was, that the three were so astonished at the altered appearance of their friends, that

they were doubtful whether they were the same men or not from whom they had parted in the morning. The stature of Little John seemed to be the only real clue that they had.

Their astonishment was so unfeigned, that Little John repeated his summons a second time before he got an answer.

Then Marian, in an assumed gruff voice, said they were at liberty to take what they liked, if they could. Hereupon Jerry began to upbraid them with being of the same party of beggars who had already used them so badly.

"It would serve you all very right," said he, "if we were to break some of your bones for you, in return for what your fellows did to us when we were quietly sleeping."

"But we are Robin Hood's men," added Jolly, "and will take no inferior advantage of you, or harm you either, only some toll we must have."

Whereupon the brothers and Little John, seeing that the three beggars still made no sign of compliance, but kept twisting their staves about in their hands, bade them prepare for blows, as they were so stubborn and would not pay toll without.

Friar Tuck immediately called out, at the top of his voice, "Hold, I say!" Marian and Ellen trembled for fear the friar would be discovered before they had carried out their intentions.

The friar went on to say that they were poor men, who had no money at all about them, and nothing save a little food in their bags.

Little John insisted that they should bring out the contents of their bags to let them see.

Marian immediately drew out a skewer from a tippet that she wore, and taking this off, spread it on the ground.

First of all, she emptied a bag full of meat and bread on it, which the brothers immediately seized, shared amongst themselves and Little John, and commenced eating.

Then a second bag of meat was opened, and the third bag, which contained the meal, was also emptied, save a good handful which Marian kept in her hand.

Ellen and her bags followed in due course.

Then came the friar who threw down two empty bags, and poured out the meal from the third.

"We are poor beggars, all three," said the friar, "and have not had a bit of luck all day."

"Surely," said Marian, "you will not take our empty bags from us."

Little John had stooped and laid hold of them, as though he would have picked them up.

"Nay, you are welcome to them," he said; "and you may thank Robin Hood for getting off with whole skins. But, remember and tell your fellows, that the next time they see poor men sleeping in the forest that they leave them alone, or, by St Christopher, we'll have it out of the bones of all your tribe."

"Thanks, good master," all three exclaimed, then stooping, they pretended that they were going to reach their bags, but instead of doing so, they each seized two handfuls of meal.

The four men were on their knees eating. As quick as thought the three flung a handful of meal in the eyes of the brothers, and the second handful they all threw in the face of Little John.

The meal filled their eyes, completely blinding them; and the pain was so great, that they tumbled up against each other and rolled helplessly on the ground.

Suddenly rising to their feet, Marian and her two companions seized the staves and struck the prostrate rogues several times on their backs, exclaiming as they did so,—

“You’ll rob poor beggars of their meal, will you!”

Then, at a signal from Marian, all three ran off as hard as they could.

Over and over rolled the unfortunate brothers and Little John, shouting most lustily all the time, and throwing out their hands to catch their chastisers, they only caught hold of each other.

At length they got upon their legs; but then Marian and her friends were out of sight, and none of the four could tell which way they ran.

“I’ve never had such a bad day’s work in my life before,” Little John said, as he stood rubbing his eyes. “Caught asleep and beaten like a knave, now blinded with meal and struck by a stripling; I think I must be bewitched.”

“We are all bewitched,” said Jerry; “a raven has flown across our path, and we haven’t seen it. Oh, I’m as blind as a worm.”

“No one shall ever catch me napping again,” said

Jaunty ; "that fellow's first blow on my head rings yet."

"For my part," said Jolly, "I say, let us wash this meal out of our eyes, and then go home again as fast as we can ; and if I ever go out without Robin Hood, may the Sheriff of Nottingham catch me."

So to the brook they repaired, and, after some trouble, succeeded in clearing the meal from their eyes.

Marian, Ellen, and the friar, having got out of the way and hearing of the four rogues without much trouble, slackened their speed.

They laughed immoderately at the exploit, and the complete success which had attended all their plans. But being afraid lest Little John and his party should reach home first, and so discover who their assailants were, they pushed forward at an increased rate, and were fortunate enough to reach the Glade before their opponents.

They communicated the result of their expedition to those who remained in the Glade, and their story caused great merriment.

To add to the fun, Robin and his men returned almost immediately after, and to them also the story was told. Robin vowed that it was the best sport he had ever heard of ; and all the band prepared to receive Little John and his fellows with much animation.

When Robin told Marian and the rest how he had fared, Marian declared that Robin should never enter Nottingham again without her ; and, ultimately, Robin

promised that she should for the future accompany him; but remain outside the walls, with a party ready to assist him upon an emergency arising.

At length the expected visitors arrived. First Jerry Cobble came sauntering in as though nothing had happened, and last of all came Little John singing.

"Hallo!" cried Robin, as Little John appeared, "who's been giving you a black eye to-day? surely you've not been beaten."

Little John stopped short in his song, and muttered something about an accidental blow he'd received from a beggar in the forest.

"Why," said Robin, "you've not been stealing meal have you, and been caught in the act? your head is covered with meal."

"Beshrew the meal!" Little John exclaimed; "the beggar must have emptied his bag on my head."

Members of Robin's band who were in the secret then came up, and Little John took off his cap and began dusting his head, though no meal was there.

"Where are the Cobbles?" asked Will; "I saw them come in just now,—where have they disappeared to?"

"Why," said Friar Tuck, "I see them yonder, all dusting their heads with their caps."

"Fetch them here," said Robin; "I can't understand this."

Several men went and brought the three brothers Cobble before Robin.

The poor fellows, hearing what had been said to

Little John, had immediately slunk behind the Greenwood-tree and commenced dusting their heads, though there was scarcely a grain of meal thereon. When brought before Robin, they stared at each other first with a rueful countenance, and then at Robin, and hung their heads down like thieves.

"Why," said Robin, after looking at them for a moment, "I never saw four men in such a plight before. Why, you've all been beaten; Jerry's left eye is closed, Jaunty's right eye is as bad, and as for Little John, I never saw a man with such a nose in my life! You've all been powdered with meal too, as though Much, here, had been dusting you."

"Nay," quoth Much; "I've dusted them not."

"I guess how the horse goes," said Marian. "'Tis thus, they've all been making love to some miller's daughter, and she's powdered them well; for I swear no man would have cast meal on their heads."

"You are all wrong this time," said Little John to Marian; "'tis true we have been beaten and powdered too, but not by a woman."

"Nay," replied Ellen; "I protest a woman hath done the most of this powdering, and no man."

The brothers insisted that Little John was right, that it was no woman's work; and they all vowed that they had not seen a woman since they left home in the morning.

"Marian and Ellen are right," quoth Friar Tuck; "women did the most towards the dusting of these men. I swear they did; for I saw them do it."

At this Robin, and all who were in the secret,

could no longer contain themselves, but roared with laughter.

"Oh, shame!" said Robin jestingly, and giving Little John a poke in the ribs; "never rob a poor beggar of his victuals again, unless you are sure of his meal."

"And," continued Friar Tuck, "they were not only powdered, but beaten by women also."

"What!" Little John exclaimed.

"Ay—beaten by women; don't deny it, you rogues; if you do, you lie. No man struck you after your heads were dressed with the meal."

"What!" asked Little John and the three brothers in chorus; "how beaten by no man?"

"I repeat, no man struck you after the meal was in your eyes," said the friar; "for I started as soon as I had flung my handful at you, and left these two fair women to dust your backs a bit."

All burst out laughing afresh; even Little John and the Cobbles were obliged to join, although they made such wry faces over it, as greatly to increase the laughter of the others.

"I see it all now," quoth Little John; "there's nothing like a good beating to take the wit out of a man. You three came upon us while our wits were still wool-gathering, though I grant that woman's wit will outrun a man's at the best of times."





CHAPTER XV.

Robin meets with Sir Richard of the Lea—He is entertained in the Forest, and borrows £400—The Abbot of St Mary's—The Knight repays the Abbot his Loan.

ONE day Robin, with Little John, Much, and Scathelock, went rambling through the forest. Robin, in no pleasant mood, lamented that they had been without a visit so long, that he scarcely remembered what a bishop was like. Little John maintained that they had been remiss of late, that visitors would have come in plenty, but that none of them had been out to give them the invitation.

Whereupon Robin said that none save himself could bring a visitor in, and hinted at the recent adventure that Little John met with when he went out with the Cobbles.

Little John laughed at the allusion, and vowed that he would not dine that day until he had brought a stranger to Robin.

Much and Scathelock begged that they might be

allowed to accompany Little John, to which Robin assented, and the three forthwith started on their errand, leaving Robin alone in the forest.

Little John led his friends in the direction of the road to Barnsdale, entertaining them with stories of his adventures as they walked along. There was no proposal made, however, to go to sleep for a time, until the expected visitor should arrive. Little John had learnt a lesson on that subject, that he was not likely very soon to forget.

They were not kept waiting long, for almost immediately on reaching the high-road, they saw riding towards them one dressed like a knight, but looking very disconsolate.

One foot was in the stirrup, but the other foot waved loose; his hood was drawn down over his eyes, and his clothes were most decidedly seedy. The horse he rode seemed to partake of the nature of his master, for his head hung down, and he walked as he liked, from side to side, now and then cropping a mouthful of the tempting grass.

The man did not seem to be aware of the presence of the three rovers until Much seized his horse's bridle, and Little John at the same moment took off his cap, and made a low bow.

The stranger threw back his hood, and appeared much surprised at the sight of the three men.

"Rise; don't kneel to me," he said, in a remarkably gentle voice, to Little John.

Little John, still with one knee bent, replied, "A man should do reverence to his master's guest."

"Who is thy master?" inquired the horseman.

"Robin Hood," replied Little John.

"He is a good, brave yeoman," the stranger replied. "I have often heard well of him; but what can he want with me, seeing we have never met? you are surely mistaken."

"There is no mistake," said Scathelock; "he waits dinner for you, not far from here."

"Things at the worst must mend," the stranger observed, half aloud.

All four immediately turned in the direction of the place where they left Robin. Little John led the horse of the stranger.

Very little passed between them on their journey; but the stranger was seen to drop tears, as though some great grief oppressed him.

On meeting Robin the stranger raised his hood, which was responded to by a very low bow from Robin.

"Welcome, right heartily welcome!" said Robin; "I have waited dinner for thee these three hours."

"Thy words puzzle me," responded the stranger; "for how thou couldst have been waiting for me, I cannot understand."

"I sent my men into the forest," said Robin, "to bring a visitor to dine with me; and they have brought thee, and therefore I say I have been waiting for thee."

"To dinner, to dinner!" cried Much; "the friar is getting hungry, I wot, before this."

Still further into the forest they proceeded, Robin

leading the stranger's horse, but failing to draw him into conversation, tears dropping from his eyes continually.

Robin thought he had got a queer visitor at last, and one from whom he would not be able to draw any great amount of merriment.

Much concluded in his own mind that the stranger's bags, which appeared to be full, would yield a good harvest, and attributed the man's tears to the fear that he had of losing the contents of the said bags.

At length they reached a beautiful glade, where they found the brothers Cobble, the friar, the ladies, and a good many men, busy in making preparations for dinner. On seeing Robin enter, they all rose very respectfully, and made him a solemn bow. One ran to the stranger's horse and held its head, while Robin assisted him to alight. Then Robin conducted him to a stream of water that ran close by, and both washed.

Dinner was now announced by Friar Tuck. The spread was one worthy of a king's table. There were roast swans, roast pheasants, roast venison, and, as a great delicacy, boiled fowl. Within a convenient distance from the table was set a barrel of wine, and a number of drinking-horns lay near. Robin insisted that the stranger should sit between him and Marian. When all were seated on the ground, the friar was motioned to ask the grace, and accordingly delivered himself of the formula he reserved for such occasions, and which, though familiar to those generally assembled, was always new, unexpected, and most unwell-

come to the guest. What it was is well known to the reader, and it produced from their present visitor the response,—

“Nay, that can never be, or thou wouldst have a sorry meal, I can tell thee.”

“Don’t talk about the reckoning yet,” said Robin; “time enough for that when dinner is over. Here’s to thy good health, Sir Stranger.”

So saying, Robin raised a horn of wine to his mouth and drained it.

“Here’s a merry life to all,” returned the stranger, putting to his mouth a horn filled for him by Robin.

The dinner was found to have been well cooked, and the stranger, who seemed to shake off some of his melancholy as the feast proceeded, praised the skill of the fair hands that had set such a feast before them.

But Marian and Ellen protested that there was no praise due to them; that the friar had looked to the meats, and the cooks too; whereupon several who had assisted at the spits shrugged their shoulders at the remembrance of certain remonstrances addressed to their locks by the reverend head cook, and all the rest laughed heartily, many of them having a lively and personal recollection of a similar remonstrance.

At length the dinner was concluded, and the stranger declared that he had not tasted such a meal for three weeks.

“If ever I come this way again,” said he, “I pledge my knightly honour that I’ll give ye all as good a dinner as ye have given me.”

At this several were uncivil enough to laugh aloud.

"Nay, Sir Knight," said Robin; "that is not the way exactly that we deal with our visitors; we give them a fair dinner, and have a speedy settlement; 'short reckonings and long friendships,' we say. Besides," he added, "there was never yet a time when a knight allowed a yeoman to provide his dinner for nothing."

The knight's melancholy seemed to return at the words of Robin, and he hung his head upon his breast.

"My honour," he said, "is all that is left me now besides my wife and family, and I protest that there is nothing in my bags save ten shillings only."

"Little John," said Robin, "go and search, without offence to the knight, or doubting his word."

Little John seemed to entertain grave doubts as to whether the knight had spoken the truth, for he took up a mantle that lay on the ground, and in the sight of all spread it on the grass. Then he unbuckled the bags, and slowly unrolled them.

He found a cloak rolled up, and in the midst a piece of linen with ten shillings. He dropt the money into the mantle with a woeful countenance, as though he felt that they had been sold.

Robin laughed, and said he should never send Little John to bring him a visitor again.

"How is this," quoth Robin to the knight, "that thou journeyest without money and without attendants in the forest, and art so melancholy, and drop tears as thou ridest along? Methinks there is some strange marvel about thy case; and," he added, in an under-

tone, "thy clothing, now I look at it, seems marvelously thin."

"Ah!" exclaimed the knight, "if thou only knew'st my sorrowful state, thou wouldst not marvel much, and wouldst pity me greatly."

"Hast thou wasted thy living riotously? or hast thou been an officer in the army? or a usurer?"

"None of these things are the cause of my sorrow," the knight replied. "My ancestors have lived in Lea Castle, in this forest, for four hundred years, and none of them yet wasted the lands that he had. I may be disgraced, but yet I hope the day will come when God will mend my state."

Robin pressed him to tell him how matters had gone wrong with him, and what was the cause of his poverty; and the knight at length complied with his solicitations.

He told them that he had a son twenty years old, a brave but fearless lad, who had had the misfortune, while engaged in a friendly trial of skill, to kill a knight of Lancashire. The friends of the slain man had pursued his son with the law, and to save his life he had to raise £400. To do this he had mortgaged all his lands, his castle, and even his goods, to the Abbot of St Mary's. On the fourth morning from that day, he was bound to pay the money back, or forfeit his land; and as he had not been able to raise the sum, he had been wandering distracted in the forest. When he was met by Little John, he was returning from the castle of one who had boasted many times of his love to the knight, but who had refused

to lend him anything towards paying off the abbot's debt.

"Hast thou any sureties?" said Robin.

"None," said the knight, "save Peter, Paul, or John."

Quoth Robin, "Thou art chaffing now, for whoever heard of a saint becoming surety for a sinner. Thou must find some other bond, or none of my money canst thou have."

"I have none other,—none in the world,—save my trust in Saint Mary."

"Thou shalt have the money right willingly," said Robin, "if thou makest Mary thy bond."

Robin, calling Little John to him, directed him to count out £400—good count to the knight.

Little John went to Robin's strong box, and counted out the money by scores of pounds, reckoning eight score to the hundred.

He was then directed to measure three yards of every sort of cloth they had. The cloth was brought, and Little John measured it with his bow, skipping three feet in every yard.

Said Much, when he saw what Little John did, "What devilkin's draper art thou, Little John?"

"John can give good measure," said Scathelock, "for the cloth cost him naught."

Little John measured the cloth off, and seeing what a heap it made, said Robin must give the knight a horse to carry it on. Robin consented, and Little John added to the gift a pair of good boots with gilt spurs,

The knight laughed and cried by turns, as he saw the cloth measured off, and looked at the heap of gold that was afterwards shifted into his bags.

He was mounted on his horse again, and the second horse's bridle given into his hand.

"Now," said Robin, "when are we to see you again?"

"By her whose name you have taken as my surety," said the knight, "I shall be here again in a twelve-month and a day with your good money, and Sir Richard of the Lea never broke his word."

Then away rode the knight through the forest, with a heart very much lighter than when he entered it in the morning.

The abbot to whom the knight owed the money resided near York, which was four days' journey from the forest. There was no time to be lost, therefore, because in three days' time the money was due. On his way to York, the knight summoned three of his men from their farms to accompany him, which they did gladly when they knew the nature of his errand.

The morning of the day arrived on which the money that had been borrowed by Sir Richard was to be repaid, or the land forfeited.

The abbot, whose name was Cantwell, early in the morning paced the abbey-yard, with his hands behind his back, and head inclined forward. By his side walked Prior Endandpoint, a thin, wiry-looking man, the very opposite in appearance to the abbot.

"Prior Endandpoint," said the abbot, "this is the

day that the knight should redeem his lands, on which he borrowed £400 to save the life of his son. £400! 'twas a large sum! I doubt he will not raise the money, and then his lands will be ours."

"It's full early," said the prior, "to think about that, the day is not far gone yet. I had rather lose £100 of the sum, than be too hard on the knight. He may be beyond the sea, fighting for England's rights, and suffering cold and hunger. It were a great pity to execute the confiscation of his lands in such a case, and it would sit hard on my conscience."

"Thou art a tender-hearted chicken," said the abbot, "whining in that way. What care have I about the matter, save to benefit our abbey? Is not the law on my side? Dust and ashes! am I to be bearded by thee continually in this way?"

The prior, seeing the abbot's wrath, retired.

From a cellar window near, the high cellarer had been listening to the conversation between the abbot and the prior; and, hearing the expressions made use of by the prior, shouted out, "The knight is dead or hanged, and Mary will have us to spend £400 a year more in this place."

The abbot stared up and then down, when, catching sight of the bald head of the speaker, he called to him to come out. Forthwith appeared a little man, as round as a barrel, with bare pate, shining as though it had been polished.

"The knight's dead," he repeated, on coming up to the abbot; "yon prior is a"—

The abbot held up his finger, and the little fat

cellarer thrust his thumb into his mouth, as though to choke his words.

It happened that one of the king's justices was then on a visit at the abbey, with a number of other dignitaries of the land, who had been enjoying the hospitality of the abbot, and amusing themselves by hunting in the abbey grounds.

The abbot laid the facts of the case before the judge, who stated most positively that the lands might be legally conveyed to his abbey, if the knight did not turn up, and he would only charge £10 for effecting the transfer.

Dinner was announced by the head cook, and forthwith the abbot led the judge, and all the goodly company, into the banqueting-hall, and they sat down to meat.

They had not long commenced before Sir Richard and his men arrived. They knocked loudly at the outer door, which was opened by the porter.

"Thou art right welcome," said he; "the abbot and all the company, for the love of thee, have gone to dinner. Ay," he exclaimed, as he caught sight of the horse on which the knight rode; "thou hast got the finest horse I ever set eyes on, and they have not been a few. Lead the horses into the stable," he shouted to the men.

"No, no," exclaimed the knight sternly; "let them stand where they are until I have seen the abbot."

Into the dining-hall he strode, and, bending down upon one knee, saluted the company.

"I hope thou art doing gladly, abbot," said Sir Richard.

"Hast thou brought the money to pay me withal?" the abbot responded gruffly.

"Not a penny of my own have I been able to get," replied the knight sadly.

"Sir Justice," said the abbot,—*"Sir Justice, I drink to thy health."*

The justice and the abbot raised their drinking-horns, struck them together, and drank.

"What dost thou want here, if thou hast not brought any redemption-money?" inquired the abbot, with his mouth filled with a slice of roast chicken he had just cut from a spit.

"I came to pray for a little longer patience."

"The bargain is broken," replied the abbot; "the day is up, more thou shalt not have; thy lands are forfeit. Sir Justice," added the abbot, in an undertone, "here is thy fee, in a little bag."

So saying, the abbot slipped a little canvas bag under the table, which the judge pocketed.

"Sir Justice," said the knight, "wilt thou not plead for me?"

"I cannot," he replied; "I hold the abbot's fee, to effect the transfer of the land."

Again Sir Richard, who still knelt on one knee, appealed to the abbot.

"Dost thou consent, then, to hold my land, good Abbot Cantwell, until I can raise the money for thee, and I will be thy true servant in the meantime?"

Now, the abbot got into a passion at this, and

almost choked himself with a piece of bread ; then he vowed that the knight should never have his lands again from him.

The knight vowed that he would have the land, or the abbot would find it more costly than what he judged.

Then the abbot began to call the knight all sorts of bad names, and finished by saying he was a false knight, and if he did not go out of the hall, he would have him kicked out.

In a moment up jumped the knight, and, with a changed voice and manner, told the abbot he had borne his insolence long enough ; that he was the most ungodly abbot that he had ever known ; that instead of looking after the souls of people, his heart was set upon gaining their lands, and his chief delight was in eating and drinking.

The abbot let drop his knife, and with mouth wide open, and eyes almost starting out of their sockets with rage, stared at the knight, who all the while he spoke stalked up and down the hall.

He was roused from his dire astonishment by the justice poking him in the ribs, and asking him aloud what more he would give to the knight if he would sign a release of his land.

"Stop, stop, Sir Knight," said the abbot, "and don't be angry, I only want what is fair ; suppose I give you £100 for the release of the land."

"Say £200," said the judge ; "it's a cheap bargain ; say £200."

"No, I won't," rejoined the abbot ; "I'll give him £100 more, or nothing."

"If thou wouldst give me £1000," said the knight, "thou shouldst not have the land. Neither abbot, justice, nor friar shall ever become my heir."

So saying, he drew from under his cloak a bag, and pitched it heavily on to a round table. The jingle that it made caused every one present to drop his knife.

"By jingo, thou art done this time," said the justice, who was really pleased at the turn things were taking.

The knight untied the bag, and poured out the contents on the table.

"Here's thy gold, Sir Abbot," said he, "which thou didst lend me; if thou hadst been at all courteous to me, thou shouldst have had a good reward to boot; but, as thou treatedst me so shabbily, thou shalt not have a penny extra."

The abbot no sooner saw the gold come rolling out of the bag, than he threw himself back in his chair speechless. There was royal cheer on the table, but the abbot had had enough. His head drooped on his shoulder, and he stared wildly on all around. At length his gaze was riveted on the face of the judge, who gave evident signs of enjoyment at the surprise of the abbot.

"Sir Justice," he said, in a loud whisper, "give me back that fee."

"Not a doit," was the reply; "I'll see you blowed first."

Then up rose the abbot, and called the high cellarer to fill him a horn of the stoutest liquor that

he had, because he was faint. The liquor was brought, and the abbot drank it; but no more toasts drank he that day. The rich lands of Sir Richard had been the abbot's in imagination for many months. He had made all sorts of plans respecting the farming of them, and had even dreamed about them at night. There now lay his money on the table, in place of the broad acres he had hoped to secure. Sir Richard insisted upon the money being counted, which was done by the prior. Then Sir Richard exclaimed, "Now, Sir Abbot, and thou man of law, have I not kept my bond?"

• "Yea, verily," replied the judge; "and thy lands are thine own again."

Hereupon the knight fixed his hood upon his head, and strode out of the door, without so much as saying "Good day."

In Lea Castle there awaited the knight, with considerable anxiety, a fair lady, upon whose face were traces of deep sorrow. Seven days before her husband had parted from her to make a last attempt to raise the money.

Her son, after the unfortunate affray in which he had slain the Lancashire knight, had been sent to London to join the king's army. There were left with her a second son and a daughter. All day long they had been straining their eyes from the battlements of the castle, to catch a glimpse of Sir Richard returning.

It was night, and there was no sight of his coming. All was still in the castle; the children were playing in

the great hall, heedless of those cares which were so sorely oppressing their mother's heart. Their merry laughter jarred upon her heart, and she stole away to an upper chamber.

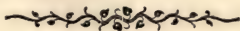
There was a fire burning on the hearth, for the evenings were cold. She drew an antique-looking chair to the fireside, and taking her harp, commenced singing a song, full of lamentation, like her heart. While she was thus playing, the old warder of the castle heard afar off the sound of horses' feet, and he even distinguished his master's laugh—a joyous laugh, as in olden time.

The inmates of the castle were quickly roused, and Henry, the younger of her sons, bounded up the stairs to call his mother. He turned the tapestry aside, that hung in lieu of a door, and then stole softly into the room. The dog which was lying on the hearth, as if it had divined the secret that the lad was about to tell, sprang up, and capered about the room. "Father is here!" said the lad; "father is here!" His mother started as he spoke, nearly letting the harp fall into the fire.

Down to the castle door she hasted, just in time to greet her husband, as, with a joyous laugh, he sprang from his saddle.

"Is all well?" she asked, as she fell upon his breast.

"All is well," was his response, "thank God and Robin Hood!"





CHAPTER XVI.

Little John goes to a Shooting Match in Nottingham, and enters into the Sheriff's Service—The chief Members of the Sheriff's Household—Tearem watches over Bucket all Night—Little John helps himself to Dinner, and has a Fight with the Cook—They steal the Plate, and join Robin Hood—The Sheriff's Entertainment in the Forest.

THE Sheriff of Nottingham was so disconcerted at the result of his late encounter, that he held no more shooting matches that year. In the early part of the next summer, however, he gave out the conditions and prizes of another trial of skill; but no thought of Robin Hood coming ever entered his mind. Robin heard of the match; but the prize, which was a young bullock, was not sufficiently tempting.

Little John, however, thought otherwise. He had not been in the town of Nottingham for several years, and had never seen the renowned sheriff of whom he had heard so much; so, taking his bow and quiver, he repaired to the town to try his skill at the archery match. Robin advised him to go in disguise, but

bade him bring no more bankrupt knights to dine with him.

Little John found a great throng about the shooting butts, and amongst them the sheriff and Gruff were pointed out to him. The two were engaged in a conversation at the time, which provoked much mirth; and drawing nearer, Little John heard the sheriff taunting Gruff with his want of skill in losing the silver arrow. Gruff responded, by laying the whole blame upon the sheriff's bungling mistake, which had cost him so dearly. However, he vowed that he would carry off the prize that day, if it was only to show the sheriff what a good shot he was.

He bragged so about cleaving a wand, and spoke so disdainfully of the butts, that the sheriff determined that the archers should have nothing to fire at but wands that day.

So one being placed in front of the butt, the archers were ordered to make ready.

Little John accordingly took his station beside the others. He was so tall that he seemed a head and shoulders higher than his companions; and his ungainly figure excited much merriment amongst the spectators.

At the first round, however, all save Little John missed the mark, whereat the people gave a great shout and made no more fun of him. The second round was the same; and the third followed, and Little John was again the only one who touched the wand.

Gruff fumed with rage, and declared that the stranger must be an outlaw; but no forester had ever

seen him with Robin Hood or his men, and so he merely laughed at their suspicions.

The sheriff declared he had never seen such skill in his life before. "What is thy name?" said he.

"Men call me Reynold Greenleaf," responded Little John.

So in truth he was a green-leaf, but belonging to such a tree as the sheriff did not wot of.

"If you will enter my service," said the sheriff, "I will give you fine clothing, good food, and twenty marks a-year beside."

"I'm your man," responded Little John.

"Well, you've won the bullock," said the sheriff, "like a man and a good archer."

"And I give it to be divided amongst those who have shot with me to-day," said Little John. "Let them have it."

"And I will add a barrel of humming strong ale," said the sheriff; "because I have got an archer now equal to Robin Hood himself."

The people shouted aloud on hearing this, and forthwith set themselves about roasting the bullock, and preparing for a feast. The sheriff, proud of his new man, took him home with him, to introduce him to Dame Gammer and the other members of his household.

There was Bucket the butler, a stiff-necked, cross-grained, middle-aged man, who lorded it over all the other servants in the house; and who grumbled at everybody save his master and mistress, and everything save the **dog** Tearem, all day long.

In the kitchen was the cook, who rejoiced in the name of Firepan, and whose skill in cooking—of which he was very proud—was continually bringing him into collision with Bucket.

To both of these gentlemen Little John was introduced as the newly-acquired member of the household ; and then he was formally brought before Dame Gammer.

The sheriff was puzzled at first to know what to do with Little John ; he could assign him no special office ; and ultimately it was resolved that he should be kept in reserve to shoot at archery meetings, and to fight, whenever called upon, for his master.

Little John's introduction to the house was the cause of great jealousy. Bucket looked upon him as an interloper, who had won the old servants' grace from the master ; while Firepan declared that such an awkward fellow was not fit to be the kitchen bottle-washer.

Little John had for a while an uneasy time of it between the two chief servants ; but found consolation and companionship in Tearem.

This dog was chained up during the day, but at night was allowed to roam about the yard. He had an unpleasant habit of springing at the legs of all about the place, and tearing the flesh, when they incautiously gave him an opportunity. He would bark at everything and everybody. If a rag was thrown towards him, he would bark most furiously ; and if Bucket or Firepan passed,—men whom all good-natured dogs would have loved and respected,—he barked as

though he suspected they had some evil design upon his food.

But Little John and Tearem became fast friends. Little John petted and caressed him, and Tearem was docile as a pup.

One day Bucket had been unusually severe upon Little John, and had scanted his allowance of food.

Little John, who was a close observer of things, had found out that the butler was in the habit occasionally of going, in the middle of the night, to the cellar to supply himself with a bottle of some choice vintage.

So one night Little John, all unobserved, slipped Tearem into the cellar. In the middle of the night the butler, not fully dressed, stole down stairs to the cellar. He had opened the door, and was rummaging amongst the bottles, when Tearem sprang upon him with a loud growl, and pinned him by his shirt behind.

In the terror of the moment, Bucket let drop the bottle that he had in his hand, which was broken on the floor. He coaxed the dog, and called it all sorts of fine names; but the animal must have had a lively recollection of some shortcomings of bone, and only replied to Bucket's fond words by a continued growl. The butler tried to relieve himself from the dog's grip, but the moment he moved a hand the dog made a snap as though he would have taken the man's finger off.

So Tearem continued to hold on, and Bucket remained standing in his cold prison during the hours of

midnight, and till grey dawn of morning began to peep in through the cellar grating at the dog and the butler.

Little John was up unusually early that morning; in fact, he had slept very little; for through a crevice in the floor above the cellar he had been listening most of the night to what had been going on between Bucket and Tearem. When the morning dawned, he roused Firepan, and communicated to him his fear that some robbers had been in the house in the night and carried off the butler.

It was Little John's duty to get the big keys of the front door and the yard-gate from the butler in the morning, and so Firepan did not suspect any trick. Together with Little John, they descended the stairs, very cautiously, to look for the unfortunate butler. Room after room was explored without finding the slightest traces of the poor man. At length Firepan declared that he heard the growl of a dog, and Little John, pretending to recognise the voice, said it was no other than Tearem.

At this point of their search they were joined by the sheriff himself, who, when informed of Bucket's mysterious disappearance, expressed his belief that the evil spirits had claimed him on account of the many delinquencies of which he had been guilty.

Again there was heard the low growl, and the sheriff corroborated Little John in the expression of his belief that it was Tearem.

Sounds came from the lower portion of the house—there could be no mistake about that; down stairs they went, and there, to the astonishment of two of

the party, they heard the butler in a deploring tone beseeching Tearem to let him go. Down the steps of the cellar they went, and there they found the poor butler, who had been keeping his vigil amongst the bottles, almost cramped and starved to death by a scarcity of clothing, and by the position in which he had been placed.

Tearem still held on to his shirt behind, and when they called him, only growled out a refusal to part with one over whom he had exercised such watchfulness throughout the night.

Little John crammed his fingers into his mouth to prevent himself from being heard laughing; but the comical appearance which the butler presented at length caused them all to burst out in a roar of laughter.

There at his feet lay a small pool of wine, in which his toes had been standing all night.

The sheriff guessed in a moment the real state of affairs, and shook his fist playfully at the butler, who still maintained the same position, held fast by Tearem, who seemed uncommonly proud of having captured such a notable offender. The sheriff and Firepan called to the dog again and again to let go, but his angry growl, accompanied with an expressive shake of that portion of the shirt he held in his mouth, signified his determination to hold on for the present at any rate.

At length Little John came to the rescue, and after admonishing the butler never to go prowling about the house at midnight like a burglar, with a villainous

intent to rob his master's cellar, he went up to the dog, and, patting him about the head, praised him, saying, "Good fellow! Good fellow! Now let him go."

In a moment the dog let go his hold of the butler, and frisked about as though proud of his achievement.

The butler, not suspecting that Little John had had so much to do with his prolonged vigil, attempted to compromise the matter by praising the sagacity of the dog, although in this instance he declared he had caught an honest man.

Not in the very best of tempers, the butler went up stairs, shivering in every limb, amidst the merry laughter of those who had found him.

Little John's behaviour afterwards induced the suspicion in Bucket's mind that he had really been the victim of a practical joke, and no sooner did this impression enter his mind than he began to plan some method of revenge.

There were two he wanted to punish : the first was the unfortunate dog who had so faithfully kept watch over him during the night, and the other Little John, Tearem's friend, or, as Bucket called him, "that odious Greenleaf." A few days afterwards the dog showed symptoms of illness, which ended in death. The butler had been unusually attentive to it since his night's imprisonment, and there was very little doubt that he had given him some poisoned meat, and so got rid of one obnoxious trickster.

He then turned his attention to Little John, who

very soon noticed the alteration in Bucket's demeanour, and was at no loss to account for it. But Little John was one of those not at all afraid of any trick that might be played upon him, but returning it with very good interest.

Firepan, long after the discovery of Bucket in the cellar, continued to tease him, and affirmed that the cost of wine was more than the whole of the other expenses of the establishment. This was a sore point with Bucket, and he vowed that he would have no such tormentors about him.

The Sheriff frequently went out hunting with gentlemen of the town; and Little John, being sometimes upon these occasions left at home, made good use of the opportunity by investigating the contents of the several rooms and chests that were about the place. Little John's eye was attracted by a quiver of arrows that hung over the fireplace, and taking them down he examined them closely—and finally exchanged several in his own quiver for those in the sheriff's. It was a part of his creed that exchange was no robbery; but he little knew the vital consequences, both to Robin Hood and the Sheriff, that depended on the arrows which he thus appropriated.

At other times Little John accompanied the sheriff and his friends on their expeditions, when he displayed his skill as an archer in knocking over game with remarkable facility. The sheriff was proud of his man, and Little John pretended as much affection for his master.

Upon one occasion Little John was left at home,

while his master went out on one of these excursions, and it being an unusually hot day, he lay in bed very much longer than usual. Dinner time came, and no friend in the household made his appearance with any refreshment for him. Now, one of the greatest objections that Little John had was fasting when hungry; and when dinner hour passed, he dressed himself and sallied down stairs in quest of meat.

There stood the butler with a savage grin upon his countenance, which bespoke some inward satisfaction.

Little John said, "Where's my dinner?" whereupon the butler replied, "In my pantry."

"Well, bring it out," said Little John.

"Go in and fetch it," said the butler.

"Bring it out, I say!" Little John repeated, vexed at the impertinent attitude and voice of the butler.

"Go in and fetch it," again replied the butler.

The pantry being close at hand, Little John went to it, followed closely at his heels by the butler. Little John tried the door, which slid down into its place from the ceiling; but the door was fast. In a moment he burst the panel with his foot, and the door sprang up sufficiently high to allow of his going in and helping himself. Seeing this, the butler started forth and laid hold of Little John by the neck, but Little John gave him a rap that doubled him up. The butler twisted himself round as though he would have retired, and Little John, seeing his bent position, could not resist the temptation, but raising his foot gave him another application which sent him spin-

ning along the passage faster than he had ever traversed it before.

The pantry was well stored with good things, and Little John, not being at all fastidious in his choice, fell to at the nearest dish, and pretty quickly made up for lost time. He also drew himself horns full of ale and wine, and altogether enjoyed his repast amazingly.

The butler, after his second blow, made such a frightful noise at the end of the passage most distant from where Little John was regaling himself, that the cook, who was busy in the kitchen, became alarmed, and hastily ran up stairs to see what the commotion was.

Up he came, three stairs at a time, with a large spit in his hand on which some meat had been roasting. In his haste to be present on the scene he almost pinned the butler to the floor, but managed to withdraw the spit after it had entered to a certain depth in a very tender part of the butler's body.

This second attack upon him made Bucket roar again, and Little John came out to see who was his new assailant. In one hand Little John carried the sheriff's favourite carving knife, and in the other he bore a horn he had just filled with wine. He stared at the cook, and the cook stared at him.

"What in the name of all that's good and fit to be killed and roasted," said the cook, "are you about there, Little John?"

"I am dining," he replied; "come and drink the butler's health."

The cook very readily accepted the invitation. Wine was a failing of his, but he had few opportunities of gratifying his taste in that respect, because the butler kept the keys pretty close.

The butler, hoping to get the cook on his side, vowed that Little John was the fellow who had half killed him, and that when the master returned he would have him severely punished for his audacious theft.

"Thou liest," responded Little John; "I am no thief, but a true man, as thou and thy master will one day find out. I have never served man unfaithfully yet."

"Don't go near him," said the butler to the cook, "and thou shalt have a horn with me, so soon as I am able to rise."

The cook, seeing the butler make some attempt to do this, laid down his spit to assist him.

"No! no!" hastily exclaimed the butler; "don't be too quick; I don't know where my bones are yet; and I have known many a man break a limb by being in too great a hurry to get up when he's been knocked down."

Very slowly the butler commenced the operation of getting up. First he stretched one limb and then the other, threw out his arms one after the other, and finally sat on the floor; but, as this last position was the most painful of all, he quickly turned round upon his face again, asserting that his back was broken.

Little John stood near the pantry door looking on, and laughing immoderately at the ridiculous exertions put forth by the butler in the endeavour to ascertain that he was sound in his limbs.

At length, by the cook's persuasion and gentle help, he was once more fairly on his legs again; and then he placed himself with his back against the wall, while the cook raised his spit and advanced towards Little John in a threatening attitude.

"There is nothing," said Little John, "that I should like better, now I have dined, than to have a bout with the master's cook. Therefore, I pray thee, lay down the spit and take thy sword, or I will carve thee as thou hast carved many a bird thyself."

The cook, who was of a somewhat fiery temper, laid down the spit and drew his sword.

They then approached each other, and in a moment their weapons were clashing in the air. The cook was a famous swordsman, and Little John was in no wise his inferior. Up and down the lobby they went, the one advancing and the other retreating, hitting at each other in right good earnest, but so well matched that neither one was able to inflict a blow upon the other.

As they advanced the first time in the direction of where the butler stood propped against the wall, he manifested extraordinary alacrity in getting out of the way, and betook himself to his cellar, where he locked himself in, and, having no fear of Tearem before his eyes, he quickly uncorked the very best bottle in the cellar.

The fight continued in the lobby above for such a time, that the butler was in doubt whether either of them would survive the conflict; and he continued to drink, long after all noise had ceased, until his own

little senses were completely muddled by the liquor, and he lay sound asleep upon the cellar floor.

Meanwhile Little John and Firepan having fought for one good hour, and being exhausted by their efforts, mutually consented to an armistice—each wondering at the skill of the other.

“I will make my vow,” said Little John, “that thou art one of the best swordsmen I ever saw, and could’st thou but shoot with a bow as well as thou dost use thy sword, thou should’st accompany me to Robin Hood and live with him in the Greenwood Glade all the year; and thou should’st have two suits of clothes and twenty marks for thy fee.”

“Put up thy sword,” said the cook; “the service that thou speakest of is the service for me; therefore, let us have a horn of wine together and swear friendship.”

They both retired to the pantry, where they feasted upon humble pie and good bread and wine. After they had eaten and drunk as much as they felt inclined to, Firepan said,—

“Don’t let us go to Robin empty handed. There is good store here of rich plate, and we will help ourselves before we depart.”

To the secret rooms they immediately repaired. The locks on the doors and chests, though they were of good steel, were quickly broken, and they took away the silver vessels and cups and spoons that were therein.

Finally they managed to open the sheriff’s strong chest, where they found £300 in gold, and putting the

gold and plate in bags, they forthwith laid them across the back of a horse which they took out of the sheriff's stable, and started on their way to Sherwood Forest. When they got clear of the town, they hastened forward, and were soon under the shade of the beautiful trees that Little John loved so well.

The cook was elated with joy at the thought of the merry life he should lead in the forest, and in a very few hours they reached the spot where the signal from Little John, blown on his horn, was answered by a note from Robin Hood himself. Soon afterwards they were met by Robin Hood, accompanied by the friar, Much, Scathelock, and several others.

Robin Hood was amazed to see the horse and a stranger accompanying Little John.

Raising his cap, Little John bent his knee before Robin, and said, "God save thee, master; I have brought a guest to-night. He is willing to swear fidelity to you, and to remain with us in the forest; and he has brought a present to you from the sheriff of Nottingham."

"Welcome!" said Robin Hood, "and welcome also to the stranger, whose bags seem so well filled."

"What tidings from Nottingham?" said Robin, turning to Little John.

"The sheriff bade me say he greets thee with love, and has sent his cook, his silver vessels, and £300 for a present."

Said Robin, "I vow that it was never by the sheriff's good-will that his cook and silver vessels and gold came to me."

"Nay," said Little John, "if thou dost not believe me I will bring the sheriff himself here, and thou canst question him upon the matter, as thou dost like."

Whereupon Little John took his leave of Robin and his friends, and ran off into the forest, notwithstanding the repeated calls of Robin for him to return.

Five miles ran Little John, and then met the sheriff hunting with hound and horn, and a few gay friends. Little John raised his cap and bent his knee before the sheriff.

"God save thee, master," said Little John.

Said the sheriff, "Reynold Greenleaf, where hast thou been?"

Answered Little John, "I have been in the forest, where such a sight as I have seen was never before known. Yonder," he said, waving his hand towards the forest, "is a young hart, of the most beautiful green that I have ever set eyes on. His head, his body, his legs, are all of the same colour, and there are several score deer with him all of the same hue. He seemed so fierce, master, that I dared not shoot him, for dread that they would slay me."

Said the sheriff, "I would fain see that sight."

Little John said, "Then get from off thy horse and walk with me, and we will see the deer where they can't get at us, and you will say that such a sight was never seen in this world before."

The sheriff got off his horse, and bade the company await him for a short time.

Into the forest he went, led by Little John. After leading the sheriff a few miles, he suddenly brought him to the place where he had left Robin examining the booty.

"Lo," said Little John, "here is the hart, master sheriff, of which I spake to thee."

The sheriff was completely taken aback, and stood still. He was evidently very much disconcerted at the sight he saw, and he remembered, with regret, how many times he had incurred the hate of Robin Hood.

Turning to Little John, he said, "Woe betide thee, Reynold Greenleaf, thou hast betrayed me."

"Nay, nay!" said Little John; "I have not; it is thyself who art to blame; for thy knave of a butler refused to give me my dinner this day, and I was fain obliged to punish him and help myself; but, master, the green hart will give thee entertainment here, and, I prythee, do thou tell the butler, when thou gettest back, that some day he and I will have a reckoning."

The sheriff wanted to return immediately to his party, but was constrained to remain by Robin. Dinner was served in the forest upon silver plate.

When the sheriff sat down to meat and saw his own silver vessels, he was sore at heart and lost all appetite. Robin noticed the change in his manner, and told him he was a lucky man,—that Little John had begged his life; for, added Robin,—

"That would have been forfeited to me had I been strict to punish thee for all the injuries thou hast inflicted upon me."

The sheriff was silent ; but, nevertheless, would not eat any of the delicate meats that were placed before him.

After dinner, Robin commanded Little John to draw off the sheriff's stockings and shoes ; his coat, which was of very rich cloth, was also taken from him and a green mantle given him in exchange, wherein to wrap his body.

Robin then ordered that the sheriff should lie in that state under a tree all night that he might see how pleasant a thing it was to live in the forest. The sheriff was obliged to lie down as directed, and had the mortification of seeing Robin Hood's men lie around him on heaps of straw and skins, while he, in the centre, had to lie upon the hard ground.

All night lay the sheriff in this way, and little sleep visited him. It was no wonder that, ever afterwards, he vowed the sight of the forest made his sides ache.

When morning dawned, and they were aroused by the song of the birds and the glances of the sun upon the landscape, Robin asked the sheriff, with mock courtesy, how he liked sleeping in the forest.

"It is harder," said the sheriff, "than any friar's life. I would not lie here another night for all the gold there is in merry England."

"What!" said Robin ; "I say thou shalt lie with me twelve months, and I will teach thee to be an outlaw."

"I beseech you," he replied, "rather than let me pass another night, smite off my head ; but if you will let me go, I will be your best friend yet."

Robin drew his sword and made the sheriff swear another oath that he would never do him evil by water or by land, and if he found any of his men by night or by day, he would help them with all his might.

The sheriff swore the oath with considerable vigour, and made up his mind, at the same time, that he would break it as soon as he had the chance.





CHAPTER XVII.

Death of Henry II.—Robin visits Nottingham in the guise of a Butcher; and the Sheriff visits Sherwood—The adventure with the two Monks of St Mary's Abbey.

ON July the 6th, 1189, died Henry the Second, and was succeeded by Richard, the wandering king of England. The circumstances of the age pointed to the Holy Land as the place where kings might obtain renown, and build for themselves everlasting names and glory by fighting around the sepulchre of Christ. The desire that Henry had for leading the expedition thither had not been fulfilled, and Richard, whose whole soul seemed framed in the sinews of war, determined that his first battle should be against the infidels.

Regents were appointed to govern England in his absence, and his brother John had granted him the earldoms of Nottingham and Derby.

These were good times for Nottingham, and the sheriff turned his attention from the forest rovers to

the prospect of having to entertain so notable a personage as the brother of the king. The people of Nottingham looked forward with fond hopes to the advance of trade, from the time when John would come to his castle. With the decease of Henry, they hoped that many abuses which had existed in the kingdom would be remedied, and that many hardships which had been practised upon the people by the king's officers would be abated; and they heard, with feelings of joy and admiration, of the resolve of the king to carry the banners of England into so holy a war as that in Palestine.

Robin Hood and his band heard of the changes that had taken place in the government of England, and determined to maintain their stand in the forest, whatsoever might betide them.

It was in the fall of the year, and Robin had not heard certain news that he desired from Nottingham, so he one day sallied forth, notwithstanding the protestations of some of those by whom he was surrounded, and determined to visit Nottingham, and see for himself what was going forward there.

As he, in the disguise of a beggar, was plodding along the road, it chanced that Robin met with a jolly butcher, who was driving a fine mare, laden with meat, which he purposed selling in the Nottingham market. This was just the thing for Robin, and he determined, if possible, to make a bargain with the butcher, to visit Nottingham in that guise. He speedily entered into conversation with the butcher, and they agreed together upon the price, not only for

the meat, but also for the horse on which he rode, and the clothes he wore,—and so a bargain was struck.

Putting his horn to his mouth, Robin was very shortly met by Will, to whom he commended the care of the butcher until his return. The butcher, pleased with his morning's work, right willingly repaired with Will to the forest, and Robin went on his way to Nottingham.

He passed into the town with as much impudence as he could command, pressed amongst the butchers, and shouted at the top of his voice,—

“Good meat for sale, come buy, my friends ; as good there may be, better there cannot be found in Nottingham market.”

To the astonishment of the other butchers, by whom the market was crowded, Robin sold for one penny as much as they sold for three, and, so long as this continued, no butcher near him could get a single customer.

They accordingly put their heads together, questioning amongst themselves who this was that could sell at so much lower a price than they were doing.

Some said, “He is a prodigal, and has sold his father's land, and this is his first attempt at trading.”

Others said, “He is some thief, who has murdered a butcher, and stolen his horse and meat.”

Robin heard these things said, and paid no heed to them, only shouting out the louder the cheapness and quality of his flesh. Robin's good-humour made the people laugh ; and the butchers, seeing that he

had now sold all his meat, said to him, "Come, brother butcher, thou must pay thy footing for standing in Nottingham Market. We are old salesmen here, and thou hast never sold here before; therefore thou must stand by the rules of the trade."

"We dine at the sheriff's to-day," said another, "and thou must make one of our party."

"Agreed," said Robin; "I will come with thee, my true brethren, as fast as I can, for he is no butcher who would deny his brethren so gentle a courtesy."

The horses were left in the charge of the boys who were hanging about the market-place waiting for jobs; and the butchers repaired to the sheriff's house, where the feast (for which the butchers had each to pay his share) was prepared. It was like an ordinary at a public inn, which the sheriff provided for certain trades that were represented in the market on fair days; and he derived a considerable amount of profit from the fees which they paid him for the privileges of trading in the market, and dining at his house.

At the door they were met by the sheriff himself, who bade the whole of them a hearty welcome. Behind him was Bucket, the butler, who also gave them welcome; and then the whole company was shewn into the large dining-room, where the table was spread with good cheer for the feast. The sheriff presided, sitting in an old-fashioned chair, while Dame Gammer sat at the bottom of the table. All were very merry.

When they were all ready, a middle-aged butcher,

who seemed to be the spokesman of the party, announced to the sheriff and his wife that they had got a new brother amongst them, who had come to the market that day for the first time, and, according to custom, he should call upon him to say grace. All the butchers hereupon hit the table hard raps with their fists, and looked towards Robin, who was so well disguised as to excite no suspicion in the mind of the sheriff.

He at once rose—

“Pray God bless us all,” said jolly Robin,
“And our meat within this place;
A cup of good sack will nourish our blood,
And so I end my grace. Amen.”

“Hear, hear,” shouted the sheriff; “fill a bumper while we drink a health to our new brother. Now, Bucket,” he added, turning to the butler, who stood behind his chair, with his eyes fixed upon Robin, “fill round quickly, man!”

The butler filled the sheriff's horn, and then went round the table, filling the horns of all the guests as quickly as he could. A very hearty wish was expressed by all for Robin's success.

The feast then proceeded with much merriment; and Robin, elated by the progress of his plan, vowed he would pay the reckoning for them all. More wine was ordered in, and bumpers were drunk to everybody by everybody. The fun soon became fast and furious, and when at last they sallied forth to look after their horses, they were in such a queer state that good bargains were made by careful house-

wives in the market that night. When they parted, all shook hands with Robin, and swore that they loved him as a brother, that he was the best man in all Nottingham Market, and they hoped that they should meet every fair day as merrily as they had that. Robin declared that every time he visited Nottingham with his horse and meat he would give them a like entertainment.

When they parted, however, the butchers began discussing who Robin could be. Some said, "He is a mad blade, who does not know the value of money, but he will find it out when he pays for the feast." Others said, "It is the first time he has come to market, but his father won't trust him again."

The sheriff whispered to his wife, "This is some foolish prodigal, who has sold some land for gold, and he means to spend all in riotous living."

"Canst thou not make a bargain with him?" said the thrifty woman. "It were as well that a little of his land came to us, as that it were all spent in eating and drinking."

"A good thought," the sheriff replied; "do thou invite him to stop this night with us, and ere we go to bed, depend upon it, if he has any more land to spare, I will be the buyer."

Dame Gammer immediately invited Robin, in very complimentary terms, as he was a stranger in Nottingham, to remain in their house that night, lest the butchers might take advantage of him.

Robin at first declined the kind offer, declaring that he was afraid of no man, and that he was bound

to go home that night,—although his ride would be a lonely one in the forest.

Dame Gammer pressed him still more urgently to remain, and at length Robin, with much apparent reluctance, consented.

The fact was, that the moment the invitation was given, Robin resolved to accept it; but fearing, lest his ready compliance would give them a suspicion concerning him, he affected reluctance.

The sheriff declared to Robin that he was the best butcher he had ever met, and the most liberal of all that ever visited Nottingham.

There was very little doubt about this, because Robin paid a good heavy bill which the butler presented to him, chalked on a piece of wood, with the greatest readiness; and this only confirmed the sheriff and his wife in their suspicion that Robin was some prodigal, who had more money in his pockets than he very well knew what to do with.

Accompanied by the sheriff, Robin strolled out through the streets of Nottingham that night, and the sheriff showed him with evident pride the jail where the ruffians—as he called the prisoners—were confined, and where they sometimes managed, he added, to place a forest rover in durance. Afterwards, he took Robin to the place where the shooting matches were always held, little thinking that Robin knew his way to the place as well as the sheriff did himself. Then they went up to the castle, and Robin was shown all the newest engines of war by one of the soldiers. They afterwards returned to a sumptuous

supper prepared by Dame Gammer, who put on her most engaging manners so as to captivate Robin. Jokes passed current during the meal, and Robin laughed the loudest. Just before bed-time, the sheriff having, as he thought, primed his guest to the humour of giving, hinted that he had rather more money than he knew what to do with, and wanted advice concerning the laying of some of it out at interest.

Robin suggested that land and cattle were the best securities for money.

The sheriff concurred, but lamented that he was no judge of either, and was afraid to venture upon such purchases. "Had he any land?"

"Yes he had," was the reply, "and he would be glad to sell some of it to the sheriff. The land was good, and was well stocked with fat cattle, as fat as could be found in any forest."

"How many head of cattle hast thou for sale, and what quantity of land?"

"Two hundred head of cattle," said Robin, "and a hundred good acres of land. If I can find a customer, I'll sell at a bargain."

"Why?" put the sheriff.

"Because I'm sick of a quiet country life, and want to see the world," was the reply. "I have a desire to go to London to join the king's army."

"If the land were good, the cattle fat, and both cheap, I'd not mind buying myself," said the sheriff.

"£300 will buy the whole," remarked Robin.

"Say £200," was the sheriff's reply. "It isn't worth

more, take my word for it, and the money shall be paid down."

"Done then," exclaimed Robin; "I'm not a good hand at buying and selling; but I agree."

"Is it to be a bargain?" said Dame Gammer, who had been quietly listening to the conversation.

"Ay," said Robin,

"Call Bucket," said the sheriff, "and let us have a bumper of wine over it."

The butler was called in, first of all, to be a witness to the bargain, and the man stood in the same strange attitude that Robin had noticed at dinner; there was something about the visitor that seemed to puzzle the butler very much. Wine was produced, horns filled, and success to the bargain was toasted. The sheriff and his visitor sat up until a late hour, and when at length the butler showed Robin to his room, the grey streaks of morning were coming through the windows.

After seeing Robin safely ensconced in bed, the butler repaired to the sheriff, and declared most emphatically his belief that their visitor had not a single acre of land, or head of cattle.

The sheriff laughed at his fears, and bade him give counsel when it was asked for, whereat the butler stole off to bed, grumbling as he went at what he called his master's stupidity.

The sheriff, when quite alone, unlocked his strong box, and taking out sundry bags of money, counted down £200 in gold. Then he sought his chamber, and dreamed away a few hours in possession of herds of cattle, and immense landed estates.

On coming down in the morning, Robin found preparations had been commenced for their journey. In the yard two men were engaged saddling the horses. Robin's horse was a dapple grey, and belonged to the butcher, but was not worth much. The other was a fine bay horse, the property of the sheriff. At length all the preliminaries having been arranged, they rode forth, the one to buy and the other to sell.

As they entered within the precincts of the forest, the sheriff said with a sigh, "God preserve us this day from a man they call Robin Hood!"

Robin told the sheriff he need have no fear of that outlaw, for he was only a coward; and nothing, save and except the presence of the sheriff, would give him (the butcher) greater pleasure that morning than the company of Robin Hood.

The sheriff shuddered at the very thought.

Away they rode through the forest for several hours, until they reached the centre, when Robin, observing a herd of deer numbering not fewer than a hundred, shouted out, "There, there, do you not see them now? How dost thou like my fat beasts?"

The sheriff stared hard at Robin as he spoke, and with a troubled voice said, "I tell thee, my good fellow, I wish I was out of this, for I do not much like thy company."

"Come, come, Master Sheriff," said he, "dost thou mean to say thou knowest not Robin Hood? However, thou shalt dine with him to-day, and then thou shalt have a fair exchange for thy gold."

The sheriff would have ridden off, but Robin seized the bridle and stopped him. Then setting his horn to his mouth, he blew three blasts that echoed through the forest far and wide. There was an immediate answer, and shortly came running in Little John, Much, Scathelock, and others, who bowed themselves before Robin, and saluted the sheriff very warmly.

"I've brought a fair guest," said Robin, "not unknown to most of you, one who can pay and not borrow."

As they turned in the direction of the place where the house erected for Robin's men stood, they disturbed immense quantities of game, all of which was pointed out to the sheriff by Robin as so much cattle of his.

At dinner every attention was paid to the sheriff, and Robin narrated to his men the entertainment he had had in Nottingham, and how readily he had sold his meat. The butcher was not present at the feast, because he was afraid of being seen by the sheriff, and being punished on some future visit to the market. Bumpers were drunk to the sheriff, Dame Gammer, Bucket, and the new fraternity into which Robin had been admitted as a brother. The sheriff begged that he might be allowed to go home before night, which was agreed to. Before he departed, however, Little John fetched the sheriff's saddle-bags, and took from thence his bag of gold, which was opened and emptied on a mantle spread before all the company. When this had been done, Robin set the sheriff on the butcher's dapple grey, and as he rode away, bade him

give the forest-rover's love to Dame Gammer, and say how happy he would be to welcome her to the forest whenever she chose to come.

The sheriff rode home a sadder, though not a wiser, man. He was fain obliged to keep the trick which had been played upon him a secret, because he knew if it once got abroad, he should never hear the last of it.

The time had now elapsed when Sir Richard of the Lea was to return the money he had borrowed. Robin lay at the root of the Greenwood-tree when a twelve-month and a day had elapsed, and calling Little John to him, he said,—

“I fear I have been guilty of some offence against the Virgin Mary, because she has not yet returned me the money.”

“Don't fear, master,” was his response. “It is yet but early morning; but do you let three of us go into the forest, and see whether we can meet with some messenger who will bring us the money, or tidings of the knight.”

“That is well,” observed Robin, “go thou into the forest, and take Much and Scathelock with thee. Mind you do not return without a visitor to dinner; for though we do not find the knight, I vow we will have a merry feast.”

Much and Scathelock were summoned, and set out with Little John to seek a guest in the forest. They went off in the same direction in which, twelve months before, they had met the knight; “for surely,” said Little John, “he will come riding that way if he comes

at all." They sauntered on for several hours without meeting any one, and Little John began to doubt whether they would be able to find a guest that day. At length they heard the tramp of horses' feet, and a great noise as of many people. They immediately secreted themselves amongst the trees, and presently they saw two monks, dressed in black, riding in advance of about fifty men, who had in charge seven sumpter horses that were well laden.

"Here come our messengers from the Virgin," said Little John.

"Her messengers are riding in state," observed Scathelock.

"One shaft will startle them off like a bird from a briar," Much said.

"Make an arrow ready on your string, Much," Little John replied; "while Scathelock and I summon them to stop."

Into the middle of the road marched Little John and Scathelock; and, in a loud voice, the former commanded the monks to halt, or they would slay both. The appearance of the two strangers made a great commotion amongst the members of the train. One of the monks made as though he would have ridden at Little John, but he checked his horse on seeing his opponent draw his bow up to his breast and prepare to shoot.

"Abide, thou churl!" Little John exclaimed; "or if thou dost advance but one step, I will send this shaft into thy heart. Thou hast made our master angry enough, keeping him waiting these hours for

your company to dine with him, without adding insult to his messengers."

"Who is thy master," said the foremost monk, "that sends his men to summon us so uncourteously to a feast?"

"His name is Robin Hood—the best man that ever lived," was the reply.

"He is a bold thief," responded the monk; "I have never heard good of him."

"You will hear good of him to-day, before thou continuest thy journey," said Little John.

"Tell Robin Hood the monks of St Mary's refused his invitation," the monk exclaimed; and, with a sudden spring, he rode at Little John to knock him down; but Much, being on the alert, fired an arrow at him which stuck in his side, and the monk fell from his horse with a loud cry.

Instantly the whole body of followers took to their heels and scampered off in different directions. The monk was wounded though not killed, and lay in a swoon on the ground. Scathelock raised the poor fellow up, and drew the arrow from his side. The other two ordered the second monk to descend from his horse, which he did with considerable alacrity. There remained of all the train only a little page and a groom, and they came up trembling at the call of Little John. He directed them to drive the sumpter horses into the forest, and wait until he came to them with the monks. Much at the same time warned them that, if they attempted to mount one of the horses or run away, he would pin them with an arrow to the





nearest tree. The wounded monk, whose side by this time Scathelock had bandaged, was then lifted on to the back of his horse, where he was supported by the other monk, who was told to sit behind him. They all marched into the forest as quickly as they could, partly in fear of the attendants returning to rescue the monks.

On reaching the glade, where it was customary for the men to bring all newly-arrived guests, Robin met the cavalcade, and on seeing the monks he took off his hood and made a very polite bow; but the foremost monk was too faint to return it, and the other was too busily engaged holding his brother up to have a hand to spare for a compliment.

Little John assisted both monks to dismount. The wounded man was evidently more alarmed than seriously hurt, and was able to walk without assistance. The sumpter horses were led up to Robin, who seemed much pleased with the trophies of skill his men had brought.

"How many men had the monks in their train?" inquired Robin.

"Fifty-two," Little John replied; "but all, save these two, fled."

"They are two brave fellows," said Robin, "to stand by their masters, and shall lose nothing through me."

"Shall I summon the band?" said Little John; "it were as well to shew the monks what a brave lot we have."

Robin blew a loud blast himself, and soon there

came, from three opposite directions, fifty men all dressed in green, who bowed to Robin and asked his good pleasure.

"Your company is desired to dinner," was the reply, at which the men laughed.

When they sat down to dinner, the places of honour were given to the two monks, upon whom Robin and Little John waited. Dinner finished, Robin questioned them as to what abbey they came from.

"We are from the Abbey of Saint Mary at York," replied one of the men.

"You are thrice welcome," responded Robin, "for I have had dealings with Saint Mary, and do not doubt but that you have come to pay the bond."

Said the chief monk, "I have never heard of a bond between Saint Mary and thee."

"Thou art much to blame then," said Robin, "for so good a saint would never have kept back the knowledge of my bond from those who were really her servants, as thou pretendest to be. Didst thou not say thou wert her servant?"

"Ay!" said the monk; "we serve her in the abbey; but in our books thy name has never stood as her creditor."

"I vow that I speak the truth; and I feel assured that you have been sent to pay the money she borrowed from me through a poor knight." Robin continued, pointing to the saddle bags, "What money is therein?"

"Twenty marks, spending money," the monk replied.

"If there be no more," said Robin, "I will not touch a penny; and if ye have need of any I will lend ye some; but if I find more, never a penny will I leave."

By Robin's directions, Little John unloosed the bags from the horses of the Monks, but in doing so, found they were so heavy that he could not carry them himself.

The monks protested against the proceeding, declaring that it was a sacrilege to rob them of their money, and that Mary would surely visit them with sore plagues and evils if they dared to touch her property.

Robin and all the men laughed at the monks' words, and felt sure that the bags would repay the search.

Those on the sumpter horses were next unfastened and piled in a heap on the grass. On investigating the contents of such of the bags as Little John selected, to the joy of the whole assembly—with two exceptions only—a sum of £800 in gold was counted out.

On seeing the money Robin turned to the monk, who had affirmed that they only had twenty marks, and said,—

"Thou seest that Mary has no confidence in thee, and she sends me the money she borrowed, twice told, and without thy knowledge. I have no patience with ye," he added; "ye are false knaves and not true men. It would serve ye both right to hang ye to yonder tree."

"Hang them, hang them!" shouted a number of Robin's men.

The two monks appeared anything but happy at the feeling excited against them. They immediately fell on their knees before Robin, and begged hard that he would spare their lives that time, and they would never attempt to deceive any more.

Upon this, Robin questioned them as to how they became possessed of the money, and how the income of the abbey was derived, with other particulars.

The monks stated that they had been visiting some of the manors belonging to the abbey, the tenants of which had been behind with their rents, and from whom they had levied the money found in the saddlebags.

After having ransacked the whole of their baggage, Robin gave them leave to depart, but insisted that they should only take two horses with them. Upon one horse he mounted the two monks, and upon the other the page and the groom. To the latter he gave a pound each, as a reward for their faithfulness in remaining by their masters, when the more cowardly had forsaken them.





CHAPTER XVIII.

Sir Richard raises the Money borrowed from Robin Hood—His Journey delayed by a Wrestling Match—Bucket leads a force into the Forest.

SIR RICHARD of the Lea, having released his lands from the clutches of Abbot Cantwell, set himself to work very diligently to raise the sum of money borrowed from Robin Hood, against the day that payment became due. The tenants were very thankful at still having their old landlord, and at his being free from his entanglements with the abbot; and, as there was a very plentiful harvest, they were able to raise in the course of the year a sum of money sufficient to meet all their landlord's requirements.

Several weeks before the expiration of the time, the knight ordered a hundred bows and arrows to be manufactured specially, as a present for Robin Hood. The bows were to be made of the very best material,

properly seasoned, and strung in the most approved manner. Quivers were also ordered, which were to be carved in a quaint style; and the arrows were to be mounted with silver, and furnished with peacocks' feathers. Such a beautiful set of bows and arrows had never before been manufactured in Nottingham. He also ordered a hundred suits of white and red cloth to be made for men who were to accompany him. The knight himself carried in his hand a spear of elaborate workmanship; by his side walked a man, who led a horse, on which were two bags containing the money he had borrowed. Each of his men carried a bow and quiver. On the morning of the appointed day, he left his castle very early, in order to meet Robin in good time; but, as the majority of the men had to walk, their progress was much retarded. Some of them, who were cunning singers, beguiled the way with their favourite songs, the whole body joining in chorus; and so, right merrily, they went their way.

In passing through the village of Mansfield, they found that a great wrestling match was being held. There was an immense crowd assembled, and, from the riotous proceedings, the knight feared that something wrong was taking place.

On making inquiries, they learnt that a prize had been offered for the best wrestler, which was of no ordinary value, being nothing less than a very fine horse, with saddle and bridle ornamented with gold. Two other prizes, in keeping with the first, were given,—the second being a white bull; and the third,

a pair of marvellously-worked gloves, a gold ring, and a pipe of wine.

He who won the first prize was to be the champion of the forest. The value of the prizes had drawn together all the most famous wrestlers that were known. The whole morning the wrestling had been going on, and considerable excitement had been created by a young man, unknown to any present, who had thrown all the old wrestlers. This was the cause of the tumult which prevailed on the arrival of the knight, who found the young stranger beset on all sides, and in danger of his life. Scores of people were crowding round a centre, where the old wrestlers had seized the poor fellow, and were about to drag him to the bridge to throw him into the river.

The knight, followed by his men, immediately forced his horse into the very midst of the throng, waving his spear in a menacing manner. His men thrust aside those who elbowed them, and threatened to shoot the first who attempted to stop their progress.

The people fell back before the horse and so strong a body of men, and called out to form a ring, that they might hear what the knight had to say.

This was speedily done, and the knight, taking advantage of his opportunity, rebuked them for their want of fair play. He said a stranger was as much entitled to take part in the contest as the oldest amongst them. No one said a word against the young man, and loud shouts of approbation greeted the knight's words.

Cries then rose for the knight to stop and decide who was the stoutest wrestler ; and the proposal was received with such tumultuous shouts of applause, that he was obliged to remain and adjudge the prizes.

In this way several precious hours elapsed, and the afternoon was far advanced before the games were ended. To the joy of the knight and his men, when the contest was fairly renewed, the young stranger, whom they had saved from violence, was still the strongest and most skilful wrestler amongst the whole company, and threw every opponent who came to measure strength with him. There was no mistake about the matter ; and when the knight did at length proclaim him the winner of the first prize, loud shouts, which signified the approval of the spectators, greeted the announcement. The remaining prizes were awarded with like satisfactory result to the wrestlers and the public. After the prizes were all awarded, the knight purchased the wine from the man to whom he had awarded it, and ordered that every one who chose should drink. The young stranger mounted his horse, and rode rapidly out of the village ; but not forgetting to thank the knight very warmly for his interference in behalf of justice.

It was so late in the afternoon when the wrestling match was concluded that the knight was afraid Robin would regard him in the light of a defaulter. He therefore lost no time in resuming his journey, now that his services were no longer required.

But the young stranger was on the road before him, making the best of his way to the Greenwood

Glade, to present his prize to Robin, and inform him of the coming of the knight. He was none other than Will Gamewell, who had gone secretly to the match, to try his skill in the games of the day. No one had been more surprised than himself, to find that he was able to pitch all who came; and he would have carried off the first prize before the knight's arrival, had the people only shewn him fair play. Will arrived just after the monks had taken their departure, and was astonished to find seven good horses grazing in the glade, and an immense pile of gold on a mantle.

"Hallo!" shouted Robin, as soon as he caught sight of his cousin; "hast thou been robbing some baron's stable, that thou comest on horseback?"

Little John examined the rich mountings of the saddle and bridle, and estimated their worth.

Will told his tale very quickly, and, leading the horse up to Robin, asked him to accept it, in token of his respect. He then related how the knight was coming, attended with a train of richly-dressed followers.

Robin sent out several of his men to meet the knight, and bring him in with all due honour, which was accordingly done. As soon as they had entered the glade, the knight formed them into line, and, advancing at their head to where Robin sat, each man made him a profound bow, and then put down before Robin the bow and quiver of arrows which he carried. After this, the knight directed two of his men to unfasten his saddle-bags.

"What are you about there?" inquired Robin.

"I am about to liquidate the only debt I owe in the world," replied the knight, "yet a debt that will never be cancelled."

Robin reminded the knight that the morning was the appointed time for the repayment of the debt, which was to have been followed by a dinner; and he informed the knight that when he did not turn up at the proper time, his bond sent two of her monks with double the amount of money he had borrowed, to redeem her credit.

The knight's countenance fell at hearing this.

"I know I have not kept my word to the letter," said he, "but I should have been here many hours ago, had I not stopped at Mansfield to assist a young man who was beset by knaves."

"Your journey was well delayed," Robin said, "and I have something to give thee for thy pains."

Robin pointed to the horse that Will had won, and asked the knight whether he recognised it.

"It is the same horse," the knight exclaimed, "which the young man won."

He appeared to be much puzzled at the sight of it, and scanned the faces of those by whom he was surrounded, as though to discover the young stranger he had befriended.

Robin called Will, who immediately came forward, and, kneeling before the knight, thanked him again for the assistance he had rendered him in an hour of need.

"Thou art a brave fellow," Sir Richard said, "and didst well deserve all that I did for thee."

"And thou dost well deserve at our hands, Sir

Richard," said Robin. Then turning to the members of his band, he added, "What say you, my brave fellows, shall we reward him?"

A loud shout was the response.

"Little John," said Robin, "go to my treasury and tell out the £400 which the monks paid over and above what was borrowed."

While Little John was doing this, Marian and Ellen brought Sir Richard vessels filled with fresh water, wherewith to wash. His men were directed to help themselves to what viands remained. There was ample store to feed treble the number that had come.

Robin excused the want of better entertainment, by telling them that guests that did not come when they were expected, must be content with what was left. The men laughed at this, and lost no time in falling to upon the meats that were set before them. Alan and Marian, assisted by others, waited upon their new guests in the most accomplished forest fashion. Friar Tuck acted as butler, and directed certain barrels of forest-brewed ale to be rolled out from the stores. Several bottles of choice wine were also uncorked for the special use of the knight. The men's appetites had been sharpened by their long walk; so they did ample justice to what was before them, and drank with much enthusiasm success to the forest rovers, long life to the ladies, and confusion to all Robin Hood's enemies.

Little John counted out the £400 as directed, and after putting it up in two bags, fastened these to the saddle of the knight's horse.

Robin told Sir Richard to use the money to reward those who had been true to him, and to purchase new liveries for his men; nor to suffer any stint in his household. He also made the knight promise that, when he wanted more, he would come and ask for it; "for," said Robin, "the loan which thou hadst was the best that man ever made."

The knight, overcome with Robin's generosity, urged many objections against taking so large a sum; but, backed by the approving voice of his men, Robin made Sir Richard accept the money.

"There is one thing," the knight said, "I may perhaps be able to do some day. My castle is near Nottingham, and as thou often visitest the town on dangerous enterprises, who knows but what, hard pressed by thine enemies, thou mayest find my castle an acceptable refuge; and be sure of this, that my gates will never be opened with more gladness to welcome visitor than they will to give shelter and succour to thee or any of thy brave band."

At this Robin Hood's men shouted, "Bravo!" "Well spoken." "Brave fellow."

"There is another thing to be said," observed a man who rose from amongst the number of the knight's followers, "that as for us there is not one but would be glad to remain with Robin Hood in the forest; but if that cannot be, whenever wanted, if only called upon, we'll be forthcoming."

The rest of the men signified their concurrence by waving their hands and shouting.

"I thank you all," Robin replied; "if you lived

here, we should eat up the forest too soon ; but the time may come, and that ere long, when I shall be glad of your services ; and know this for a certainty, that, relying on your assistance in case of need, we shall have no fear in taking up our bows for the defence of those who are oppressed."

The very best feeling was thus established between the men. When they prepared to depart, Robin noticed that they were without weapons of any sort.

"This will never do," he said ; "for who knows what may happen to you before you leave the forest. You have brought us a set of bows and arrows, the like of which we have never seen before, and it would be an ill return on our part if we were to allow you to go without even a stave to defend yourselves with."

Sir Richard protested that they were not at all afraid of meeting with any body of men in the forest ; but Robin insisted that they should have quarterstaves. Much and Scathelock accordingly brought out a large stock of well-seasoned staves, which Robin's men had cut as they had opportunity in the forest. Each of Sir Richard's men armed himself with one of these weapons, and then they departed, full of delight at the meeting they had had with the noted forest rover.

While Robin was entertaining these guests, an entertainment of a very different sort was being prepared for some of them in Nottingham. The retainers of the monks, on getting clear of the three forest rovers, made the best of their way to Nottingham, where they raised a great outcry on behalf of the monks. They wanted a force to go into the forest to capture

the three wretches who had slain the monks, as they believed and declared. The sight of a number of men racing through the streets of the town drew after them a considerable concourse of people, in whose ears rumours of wars had long been current, and who invested the new story told them by the fugitives with all the importance of an intended attack upon the town.

The fugitives and the townspeople crowded the sheriff's yard. The sheriff himself came out in alarm, followed by Dame Gammer and Bucket. Several men spoke at once, and all told different stories about the attack made upon the monks; though all agreed in stating that there were only three forest rovers who had committed the mischief.

"Why," said the sheriff, "surely there were enough of you to take and eat them."

"O! O!" exclaimed the Abbey men; "but we were not armed, and they might have shot us all at a distance."

They wanted the sheriff's permission to take a force for the rescue of the remains of the monks, and to punish the offenders. The sheriff, on hearing their story, guessed very readily whose men had been at work, and was unwilling to risk his own person in such an enterprise. He granted the request of the men, and ordered the bells to be rung to summon the trained bands, so as to get volunteers for the expedition.

In a short time the alarm bells were ringing, and the people thronged the market-square, where the crier announced that the sheriff required the trained

companies to go out to Sherwood forest to punish three men who had killed two monks, and also to bring in the bodies of the deceased.

"Be it known unto you all," shouted the crier, "that the sheriff of this city doth order and require that the loyal companies of butchers, bakers, cooks, and weavers, do instantly prepare to accompany the men of St Mary's Abbey into Sherwood forest, on a mission of mercy and no danger; therefore the sheriff doth require that you come armed in no other wise than with oak staves, lest any of you by accident become lamed on the way through any falling out amongst yourselves."

The sheriff's order was repeated from mouth to mouth, and the members of the said companies made themselves ready without delay. The place of rendezvous was the market-square, and thither they soon repaired, and fell into the ranks of their respective companies.

The butchers came up, headed by a number of apprentices, playing the national anthem of the period on marrow bones and cleavers; and, by the express permission of the sheriff, this band was allowed to accompany the expedition into the forest.

Next came the cooks, each man armed with a good oak staff, fashioned more like a spit than anything else; and with these they boasted they would put to flight any army.

The weavers came, armed with staves of all sizes.

They all fell into good order in the market-place preparatory to setting forth.

A question then arose amongst the Abbey men as to who should be the leader of the party.

The sheriff had the honour offered him; but declined on the ground of urgent state business requiring his attention.

Bucket, who was standing near, hearing the refusal, in a fit of loyal enthusiasm, offered his services, which were instantly accepted. The sheriff made no opposition, and the butler proceeded to array himself in suitable apparel. On his head he placed a broken iron pot, which fitted his pate like a helmet. On his breast he buckled a stiff leathern shield; and in his hand he carried a baton as the symbol of his office. He did not neglect other equally weighty matters, and in his pockets stuffed bottles of wine for the refreshment of his own particular self during the day. He was mounted on one of the best horses in his master's stable; and rode along the proudest man in all Nottingham.

On his appearance in the square, the butchers' band struck up the air that, in those early days, did duty for "See the conquering hero comes!" The people shouted, and the trained bands waved their weapons, as Bucket rode round the square several times to see if all were ready.

He then gave the order to march, and taking the lead, proceeded along the streets to the nearest gate.

The walls of the town were crowded to see the cavalcade pass out, and loud cheers greeted them as they went under the gate, and out into the high-road, in the direction of the forest.

Nearly two hundred men sallied forth in this way to do battle on behalf of the king, the sheriff, and the monks of St Mary's Abbey. The music—which, if noise were a merit, certainly possessed it—ceased as soon as they entered the forest. The butler gave the command, "March easy," and immediately the men, who had been going in something like order, straggled out of the ranks, and sauntered about in groups, shouting, singing songs, or telling wonderful stories of adventures.

After a few miles had been thus traversed, some of them began to lag behind; and, the day being hot, lay down on the banks, or under the shade of trees, to rest, where they quickly dropped asleep. The force thinned at a rate that would, perhaps, have alarmed Bucket had he been conscious of it. He, however, had been taking care of himself while riding at the head of the men, and had skilfully abstracted the bottles of wine, one after the other, from his pockets. When he had released the bottle, he would ride forward at a furious rate, as though to reconnoitre, and, throwing his head back, would drain the contents of the bottle. The effect of this indulgence was greater than Bucket anticipated. He became more and more demonstrative in his proceedings, rode forward at a violent rate for a considerable distance, and then just as swiftly returned, all the while vociferating orders as if the enemy was in view. He rode from side to side, and conjured the trees to aid him in his lawful endeavour to stop such sinful practices as those from which the monks had suffered; and not to hide

from righteous punishment the persons of whom they were in search. During these frantic movements, Bucket's iron head-gear gradually slipped on to the back of his head, and made him look uncommonly fierce.

The number of stragglers increased to a very great extent; and at length the whole of the butchers' band, by private arrangement, slipped to the rear, and then quietly sidled off amongst the trees, where, as soon as they thought Bucket and those with him were out of hearing, they set up such a concert as frightened all the birds and beasts of the forest away in hot haste.

The sound of horses' feet was at last heard, and Bucket discovered the presence of the enemy, as he imagined them. Waving his baton, he exclaimed, in a loud voice,—

"They are here! they are here! pre—pare—to—attack!"

There was a sudden alarm amongst those who remained with him, and instead of forming into anything like line of battle, they crowded together like a herd of frightened sheep in the centre of the road, and but few displayed their weapons.

In a few minutes the cause of all this alarm presented itself in the appearance of the two monks and their attendants. On coming in sight of the crowd in the roadway, the wounded monk, who rode in front of his companion, gave a loud grunt of alarm, and fell back fainting into the arms of his brother.

Bucket, on seeing the men, rode behind his diminished army and shouted loudly,—

“At them, men, at them! bring them down, and let me bind them!”

The men, however, were too startled to stir. The retainers of the abbey, who formed the kernel of the crowd, fancied they saw a ghost in the person of the foremost monk, and could not move. The crowd generally had the idea that there were only three men against whom they were sent, so that the presence of the fourth man perplexed them very much. They were all on horseback too, and this was not what had been expected.

The shouts of Bucket at length revived the monk who had fainted, and he called out that they were only two poor monks who had been robbed of all their money and wounded.

The abbey retainers recognised the voices of their masters. There could be no further doubt that they were human, so they at last advanced to render what assistance they could. The groom and page were each surrounded with a crowd of eager men anxious to know what had happened in the forest. When the story was fully told, a sort of panic appeared to seize the members of the Nottingham trained bands, and the majority refused to go any further in search of those who had robbed the monks and stolen all the sumpter-horses.

Bucket, however, was determined that he would proceed; and, by promising all sorts of rewards, he persuaded upwards of eighty to go with him a little further in quest of the notable robbers. The monks dismounted, and were to remain in the same place

until the return of the whole party. The brave men under Bucket immediately resumed their march, little thinking what was in store for them. Bucket was in a state of happy ignorance of the demoralised condition of his band, or he would never have proposed a second enterprise to them. He rode ahead and back again, just as before ; but on one of these excursions he saw a sight that almost sobered him. In the middle of the roadway, coming towards him, was a body of men, dressed in white and red, led by one riding on a beautiful horse. Each man carried a long staff upon his shoulder. They advanced steadily, but silently. Back rode Bucket, and, getting his men in front of him, he called out to form in line to receive the enemy. The line was formed across the road, while Bucket kept still in the rear.

The enemy was no other than Sir Richard and his friends, returning from their entertainment in the forest. When they came in sight of each other, the astonishment of both parties was very great. Bucket's line wavered considerably ; but, as he rode from one side of the road to the other, the men were afraid of stirring, for fear of being trampled under the feet of his horse.

The knight rode slowly on ; but when he came up to where the line was spread so threateningly across the road he stopped. So far as numbers were concerned, Bucket had a decided advantage ; but the knight's men, though fewer, were in better trim for fighting.

Sir Richard watched Bucket for a few minutes, as

he rode like a madman across the road, shouting words wholly unintelligible; and then the knight called out to know what they meant by obstructing the king's road in that manner.

Bucket made a long speech in reply. He said, "I am the Sheriff of Nottingham, or acting in his name, and with his authority, though I am only Bucket the butler, in fact, but it is no matter. I have come here to take thee and all thy men prisoners, though we only expected to meet three. It is no matter though, for we shall take all bound to Nottingham; and if, by some evil chance, any escape hanging, it will be a pity, and no fault of mine."

"Madman," exclaimed Sir Richard, "discharge thy force instantly, or we will baste their hides soundly."

"Down with him!" shouted Bucket, "down with him! he opposes the king's authority, and the good Sheriff of Nottingham."

As he spoke, he pointed with his baton to Sir Richard, but no one stirred. In a fit of desperation, he spurred his horse through their ranks, knocking five or six of his own men down, and advanced with a threatening manner towards the knight. Raising his baton in his hand, Bucket made as though he would have hit the knight on his head; but a blow on the ribs from Sir Richard's spear sent him head first over the horse's tail, amid the laughter of the men.

"Forward!" exclaimed the knight to his followers, "and shew these Nottingham knaves what they get by molesting honest people on the highway."

With a loud shout his men instantly darted forward, waving their staves in the air, and the next moment, if Bucket's force had felt inclined to run, they found themselves unable, for they were in such close quarters that most of them found a man for his match, and blows were exchanged in right good earnest. Knocks seemed to revive the spirits of all, for Bucket's men, when fairly engaged, struck out manfully. Some were laid sprawling on their backs, and many a crown was cracked under the severe blows inflicted by the oak staves which Sir Richard's men carried. Disdaining to take advantage of his position on horseback, after the ignominious defeat of Bucket, he sat still and looked on, encouraging his men by word of mouth. Though Bucket's adherents were the most numerous, it was evident to the knight that they had no chance against his. Little heaps soon dotted the ground, not of killed, but men with sore wounds, that bled much. All the while Bucket, happily unconscious of what was going on, lay where he fell, his horse standing quietly by his side. He had been partially stunned by his fall, but was much more stupified with drink, and was fast asleep when the battle waged at its height.

After fighting for some time, there came a sharp cry for "Quarter!" on many sides; and Bucket's men dropped on their knees, and begged for mercy at the hands of their opponents.

By Sir Richard's directions his force ceased; and then he found that, though many of them had met with severe bruises, none of them were seriously hurt.

When the cessation of hostilities took place, Bucket's men declared that they had not come out expecting to meet such a force as they had encountered. They helped one another with good-will to bind up arms and heads, and cleanse the blood from faces; after which, some who had escaped from bruises turned their attention to Bucket. They found him, to their surprise, snoring away. There was no blood upon him, or mark of any wound, so he was roughly shaken until roused, and then they found him so drunk as to be incapable of standing without help. With much difficulty he was raised to the saddle again, and two men on each side held him up. Then they returned together to the place where the monks and the rest awaited them. Mutual explanations followed, and the monks acquitted the knight of any intentional wrong done to the party. Sir Richard took his leave before the monks and Bucket were ready to start, and pushed on with some haste to his castle.





CHAPTER XIX.

Bucket's Return to Nottingham—Robin resolves to sell his Plate—The Sheriff is invited to Lea Castle, and buys his own Plate—The Discovery of the Fraud—The Sheriff attempts to capture Lea Castle.

ON parting from Bucket and the monks, Sir Richard made the best of his way home, and a very merry evening was spent in relating to his wife and family the manner in which his return had been delayed, by the encounter with the sheriff's men from Nottingham.

The monks and Bucket, with all their host, having rested for some time, at length commenced their homeward march, but by no means in the same happy frame of mind they had set out. On their way they picked up one and another of the groups of stragglers from whom they had parted in the course of their progress in the morning; and at last the butchers' band dropped in, having exhausted all their strength in a miserable attempt to keep themselves and the forest

lively with their music. As they received new accessions of strength, those who had been in the affray told magnified stories of their encounter with the knight and his men, until the narrators and the hearers began to believe that a most bloody battle had been fought with a force very much superior to them in point of numbers. Bucket did not ride at the head of the men as in the morning, but lingered on his way, giving those in immediate attendance upon him full employment to keep him on his seat. His remarkable unsteadiness was attributed to the terrific fall which he had had ; and, as if to keep up the deception, a cloth covered with blood was bound round his head in place of the iron helmet which he wore when they first started. Those who had received wounds in the encounter made the most of them in the way of grumbling.

They re-entered Nottingham late at night. Their return had been very anxiously expected, and when the time came for the gates to be closed and the force had not returned, great fears were entertained for their safety. When they came within sounding distance of Nottingham, the butchers' band struck up their discordant music, and the walls and streets soon became crowded to see the victors enter with their prisoners.

In the moonlight the monks, who rode on horseback, were mistaken for two of the supposed prisoners, and loud shouts greeted the warriors. These were all changed to surprise and horror when the wounded monk was seen to be supported by a

brother, and Bucket was discovered to require similar assistance to maintain his seat, and many of the men were seen to have bandaged heads, or their arms in slings, while not a few had turned two oak staves into crutches, and were hobbling along with their aid.

The sheriff was amongst those who had come out to welcome the band home, and when he saw Bucket, could hardly forbear laughing at his appearance. In a moment the sheriff divined who the real robbers were that had beaten the monks and stolen their money, but he falsely conjectured that the same force had met with Bucket and his men.

The monks and their retainers were received into some of the abbeys for the night, while the sheriff dismissed the trained bands with the thanks of the king for their services. The people repaired to their houses, to discuss with friends and neighbours the events of the day.

Bucket was taken home, and helped to dismount in the yard; all his attendants were dismissed, and the gates of the yard closed. Then, by the sheriff's directions, Bucket was led to the pump, and copious streams of water sent over him, which brought him to himself in a very speedy manner. He was then taken into the house, and Dame Gammer brought some sticking-plaster to doctor his head; but, on an examination of his pate being made, to the surprise and amusement of all in the house, there was not even a scratch to be found. There was a bump, hard and round at the back, but whether it was a

gift of Providence or grace it was impossible to tell. He was sent to bed half sobered, and left to sleep off the effects of his chivalrous attempt to capture three notable robbers.

During the night the cook, whose name was Pots, and who was successor to Firepan, was kept awake by hearing orders shouted out at the top of Bucket's voice, which seemed to indicate that he was fighting over again in his dreams the battle of the day. This was anything but pleasant to Pots, who was a man of very nervous temperament.

In the course of the following morning a deputation of brethren from several of the leading abbeys, accompanied by the monk who had not been wounded, waited upon the sheriff, to lay before him a statement of the wrongs to which one of their number had been subjected. They urged that an expedition should be got up at once to scour the forest, and capture Robin Hood and all his band, upon whom they desired immediate execution should be done.

The sheriff listened in silence to all that was advanced, but told them frankly it was impossible for him at that particular time, when they wanted all the force they could get in Nottingham, to send a special expedition into the forest. Besides, he wanted to know whether the abbeys were prepared to pay the costs of such an expedition; because if they would not, unless he had the special authority of Prince John, the new Earl of Nottingham, he dared not comply with their request.

The members of the deputation urged that the prince should be informed of what had taken place, and a request forwarded that his trained soldiers should be sent on the service. They insisted that it was of the utmost wellbeing to all the abbeys in the land that a stop should be put to such depredations. The sheriff promised that he would lay the complaint before the prince when he arrived, and if he chose to send out one or more detachments to capture the forest rovers, he would gladly render all the assistance that lay in his power. With this the monks withdrew satisfied.

Robin little thought what a formal and serious deputation had been waiting upon the sheriff, and was rather alarmed when his scouts brought him word. He vowed he would spare no monks in future that came across his path, but would take everything they possessed.

His band was now constantly on the increase, and the new-comers found the forest-life just as attractive as did the leaders themselves. Some of them he suffered to remain with him, and others he placed under the orders of his scouts in the villages bordering on the forest.

For several days after Firepan's arrival, he took upon himself the task of cleaning the sheriff's plate. It was used on several occasions for dinner, but many of the band declaring they preferred eating in their old way, the use of the plate was discontinued. Friar Tuck found his peculiar privileges somewhat invaded by the presence of a practical

cook. For a time he watched the cooking operations with much anxiety, as though he doubted whether the new cook was up to the mark; but, finding that the meats were done to a better turn than ever they had been done before, and that the man was skilful in the manufacture of gravies, such as the friar had rarely tasted, he resigned, without a grumble, the honourable post of cook to Firepan. There was another department which the friar still retained the superintendence of, and one which, without doing him any discredit, it may be affirmed he was much better qualified to direct than any other. This was the wine and ale department. In the stores of the band they had dresses made to fit all sizes, and a large stock of bows and arrows.

The rovers indulged regularly in games of skill, teaching their new hands the most approved movements in wrestling, shooting, or the use of the quarterstaff.

Looking over the stock one day, Robin resolved, on the cook's recommendation, to dispose of his plate, as it was only becoming deteriorated by being kept. The difficulty was how they were to dispose of it. They knew it was no use taking it to any of the abbeys, because they paid so little for plate. At length, Much suggested that they should send it to Lea Castle, and ask Sir Richard to undertake the sale. This suggestion was approved by all. Little John, half jokingly, suggested that the sheriff should have the first offer, as he had the best right to it; and he was quite sure the plate looked so well that the

sheriff would never recognise it. After some discussion this was agreed to. The plate was packed up in the most secure manner, and slung in panniers on the back of a horse.

Scathelock and Will were selected to take it to the knight's; and they were directed to tell him all that had passed with regard to it.

On reaching Sir Richard's castle, they blew a loud blast upon a horn, which was the signal agreed upon between the knight and Robin. In a few minutes they saw a lady at one of the castle windows, and in another moment they saw the knight at the gate, which four men were working open. The draw-bridge was quickly lowered for the admission of the strangers with their horse.

The men were led into the castle, and introduced by the knight to his lady and his sons. The box containing the plate was carried by the knight's men, and placed in the dining-room. Before it was opened, the knight insisted that his visitors should take some refreshment; and they all sat down at a table laden with the most costly viands.

"All these good things come from Robin," said the knight, "for which and for all his goodness we shall never be able to repay him."

Then suddenly checking himself he rose, and with mock solemnity said, "What we are about to receive, Robin Hood has had to pay for. So mote it be. Amen."

Will and Scathelock laughed at the knight's wit; but the lady rebuked her husband for his profanity, as she called it, though she could not help laughing herself.

Sir Richard related to his visitors the strange adventure he had in the forest after parting from Robin Hood. When dinner was concluded, the lady retired, and Will told Sir Richard the errand on which they had come. They drew such a picture of the sheriff's covetousness, and told so many droll stories of his faithlessness towards Robin and his men, that the knight entered heartily into the scheme proposed, and declared that nothing would give him greater satisfaction than punishing a man who knew so little how to keep plighted word. When the box was opened, the plate was found to be in a very bad state. It was deeply stained from having been kept in a damp place, and was quite green. The knight declared that the maker of the plate would not have been able to recognise it.

Measures were then discussed for the sale. To relieve the knight from any real participation in the affair, it was arranged that a letter should first be written to the sheriff, which Scathelock, who was the only one not known in Nottingham, should convey. The following letter was accordingly written:—

“MR SHERIFF,—I have a large and valuable collection of plate at my castle, which is for sale; it has been brought here from the residence of a friend of mine, who is desirous of selling it by private contract, and he instructs me to request you to undertake the disposal of it, on the usual commission.—Your servant,

“RICHARD, Knt.

“Lea Castle.”

Dressed in the livery of one of Sir Richard's servants, Scathelock went to Nottingham and presented the letter at the sheriff's house. The sheriff happened to be from home at the time, and Dame Gammer could not read. A messenger was accordingly despatched to bring home the sheriff, and a second was ordered to bring in the first monk he chanced to meet in the street. Fortunately, both individuals arrived at the same time. Scathelock presented his letter, the sheriff broke the seal, and then handed it to the monk, who, after some little hesitation, read it aloud.

"A fair castle is this castle of the Lea, Mr Sheriff," said the monk; "and the master thereof hath a good cellar of wine; I should like to accompany you."

Scathelock pressed the monk to return with the sheriff; but he refused, saying, the spiritual interests of the people of Nottingham required his presence at home.

The sheriff consulted his dame on the subject of the plate; and, after sundry complainings of bad times, prepared to visit the castle. It was arranged that Pots should accompany him; and the sheriff placed in a bag the sum of £200, which he afterwards consigned to the care of his cook, with sundry injunctions that he was not for an instant to allow it out of his sight.

The three—Gammer, Pots, and Scathelock—then mounted horses to go to the castle.

The knight himself received the sheriff, and after the usual interchange of compliments, conducted him to an entertainment, at which the wine produced fully warranted the praises of the monk. After dinner,

the sheriff was led into the butler's apartments, where, in the dim light, the knight hoped the sheriff would be unable to identify the plate. There was, however, very little fear about it, for the sheriff was in such a condition that he would have scarcely recognised his wife had he seen her. The plate was drawn out piece by piece, and duly examined and tested by the sheriff in the fashion suggested to him at the moment. He rapped each piece with his knuckles, tried to bend them with his fingers, and then held them up between his eyes and the light, as though he wanted to look through them. Having examined all, he turned to Sir Richard and said, "How much?"

Said the knight, "My friend has sent messengers with the plate, and they will tell you how much he wants for it."

Will and Scathelock immediately stepped forward, and Will said, "The plate was valued at £500, but, being in want of money, their master would take £200 for it."

"Very cheap," exclaimed the knight; "a remarkably good bargain, Mr Sheriff; and as you will doubtless have to entertain some members of Prince John's suite when he visits Nottingham,—if not the prince himself,—you must feel glad of the opportunity of purchasing such an exceedingly good stock of plate, and at so reasonable a price."

The sheriff appeared to be of the same opinion as the knight, and turning to Will said, "I'll buy."

Holding out his hand, he took hold of Will's, and called upon Scathelock to witness the bargain; where-

upon Scathelock, in severing the hands, gave the sheriff such a blow as made him shout with pain.

Pots was then directed by the sheriff to count the pieces and pack them up in the box.

"There is one thing I must insist upon," said the knight, "that these good men give you a receipt for your money."

"No need in the world," said the sheriff; "I've got the plate, and here's the money," handing over the bag to Will; "so don't trouble about that."

Will had brought the receipt with him, which was immediately produced, and handed to the sheriff upside down. That worthy looked at it for a moment, as though he was reading it, then folded it up and put it in his pocket. The plate having been duly packed, was placed on the back of one of the horses; and the parting word having been spoken, the sheriff mounted his horse, and Pots followed, leading his with one hand, and keeping the sheriff upright on his horse with the other hand.

The sheriff reached his house in safety, and was handed over to the care of the butler, who roused his master to partial consciousness by the same application of cold water, to which his master had once treated him.

The following morning Dame Gammer had the box of plate brought into the dining-room to be opened. The sheriff summoned Bucket to see the display, and all were on the tiptoe of expectancy. Having lifted out two or three pieces, the butler looked very serious. Staring his master full in the face, he uttered two

words of most unpleasant sound, they were, "Robin Hood!"

The sheriff sprang nearly a foot in the air, and looked all round.

There was no one present save Dame Gammer, the butler, Pots, and himself. So Gammer looked at the butler again, who immediately cried out, in a still louder voice, "ROBIN HOOD!"

Again the sheriff sprang into the air, and then looked towards the door and window.

Dame Gammer screamed, "Where, where?" while Bucket, in a most insane way, kept pointing at the plate. To relieve the evident alarm of the sheriff and his dame, he added, "Greenleaf—Firepan—the plate," and still pointed at the silver articles on the table. The unpleasant truth at length began to dawn upon the sheriff, and he seized the butler by the arm. Unwilling to admit the possibility of his having been seduced into his mind, he stared his favourite Bucket in the face, and said, with an agitated voice, "No!" The butler, however, said "Yes" gravely, and closed his lips with the determined air of a man who was quite positive.

Bucket took up several of the pieces of plate, and pointed out to the sheriff some private marks, which enabled him to swear to them. There was not a piece amongst them but what belonged to the sheriff. The sheriff bethought himself of the receipt which had been given him, and Pots was despatched for another reverend decipherer. The receipt was meanwhile produced, and examined by the butler in a

most sagacious manner ; but, as he could not read a word of it, he forbore committing himself to an expression of opinion. A monk was brought, and the receipt handed to him. He immediately read aloud,—"Received from the Sheriff of Nottingham the sum of £150, for plate deposited with Robin Hood for safe keeping, by the sheriff's own men."—(Signed)—"ROBIN HOOD."

The sheriff groaned inwardly ; Dame Gammer screamed ; Bucket bit his lips ; and Pots dropped on his knees, and tremblingly gave thanks for his deliverance from Robin's men. The sheriff next fell into a towering rage, and squared his fists at Bucket, who beat a hasty retreat, after which he fell foul of Pots, who, not being quite as active as Bucket, got some slight assistance in leaving the room. Nor was the sheriff's peace of mind restored until after the lapse of several hours, and then, indeed, but partially. He had not only been robbed of his plate, but cheated in his purchase, as it was evident from the receipt that the men would have taken £50 less than they did.

The sheriff vowed that the knight should be called to an instant reckoning for his share in the transaction, although his mind was in such a muddled state that he was by no means sure that Sir Richard had taken any part in the sale at all. Summoning a number of men, whom he armed with bows, arrows, and short swords, he sallied out of Nottingham, determined to have a short and sharp reckoning with Sir Richard of Lea Castle.

The knight had calculated upon a speedy discovery

being made ; and as soon as the sheriff left the castle, took such measures as he thought most prudent for his own protection. He was not afraid of standing a siege for any length of time. His retainers and vassals were all at peace with him. He was not involved in any disputes with his neighbours ; and he knew that he could rely upon their assistance in case of need.

He had so low an estimate of the skill of the Sheriff of Nottingham, that he took no further steps to defend himself than a trick would accomplish. He directed some of his men to loosen all the planks in the drawbridge in such a way that, when it was lowered into its place, the slightest weight would precipitate the unlucky walker into the water below. This having been done, he ordered a number of buckets to be filled with a mixture of flour and water, of the consistency of paste. These buckets were placed within the outer wall of the castle.

The morning after the sheriff's visit, the drawbridge was lowered very carefully, and a sharp look-out was kept lest any friends, coming up unawares, should suffer that which was not intended for them. Men were also stationed in the towers to look-out for the coming of the sheriff.

Noon had hardly passed two hours when the watchmen gave the alarm that a force was in the distance coming from the direction of Nottingham. Sir Richard and several others were quickly with the look-out in the tower, and saw, very plainly, a band of about twenty men creeping along the edge of the forest, half hidden in the shade of the trees. In case

of a surprise, Sir Richard had taken the precaution to arm his men. He stationed a dozen men within the outer wall of the castle, armed with spears, but with instructions, in the first instance, to make such use of the buckets and pasty mixture as they best could before the sheriff's men had scrambled out of reach. When the force approached near enough to be able to discover what was going on about the castle, the look-outs were secreted. The sheriff was recognised as one of the party; but when within a mile of the castle, they all suddenly disappeared in the forest.

The sheriff, believing that his approach had not been discovered, had ordered his men to make a circuitous sweep, so as to come out of the forest in front of the castle gateway. He had devised no plan for the attack, but told his men, in general terms, that they were to keep well together and use their swords unsparingly when they came to close quarters with the knight's men. He was determined, he said, to drag the knight by his heels, if he refused to walk, to Nottingham, there to be tried before the judges for aiding and abetting Robin Hood. He relied upon taking the castle by surprise. When they had come to a point in the forest commanding a good view of the castle, they were all delighted to see the draw-bridge across the moat and the gate of the castle open. He fancied he heard shouts of laughter proceeding from the courtyard, and came to a somewhat hasty conclusion that they were making merry over the money received from him for the plate. He ordered his men to creep under cover of the trees to

the very edge of the forest, and then to bolt across the open ground, rush into the castle, seize the knight and bind him; and then he promised to give the castle up to them for several hours to plunder. The men, believing that there would be no opposition, acquiesced in all their leader said.

They crept to the edge of the forest; and on a signal being given, darted across the open ground with their swords in their hands. In a moment they were on the bridge, and the next the timbers broke beneath their weight, and they fell headlong into the moat. Splash, splash went the men, head over heels, one on the top of the other, with rough pieces of planking between them, or tumbling upon them.

While they were floundering thus in the moat, a dozen men appeared carrying the buckets. They walked along some stay timbers of the bridge; and as each man scrambled out of the water, he was soured with some of the contents of the bucket. The stuff ran down their heads and faces, and over their clothes.

The men in their fright had dropped their swords in the moat, and bows, which had been slung across their backs, were rendered useless by the water. The men were, therefore, helpless in the hands of their tormentors. They cut such a peculiar figure, that the men who used the buckets were several times in danger of losing their footing through laughing; and at last they did tumble their buckets into the moat, and were scarcely able to save themselves from slipping in after them.

The sheriff was one of the first to reach the bank ; and received a full bucket of mixture, which well-nigh toppled him back again. He scrambled away, however, on his hands and knees, looking like a huge white mouse. The men looked as men would look that had had a quantity of white batter thrown over them ; and, on reaching the bank, had some difficulty in clearing their smarting eyes. As soon as they were able to see what they were about, they started off at a sharp run for the forest.

The sheriff, being fleet of foot, was the first in the race, outstripping all his companions. Some of the men seemed bewildered by their fall, and, while rubbing their eyes, ran in the wrong direction, and so plunged into the moat again.

When all were fairly landed, the knight gave orders to pursue them for some distance. Mounting with three of his men, the horses were spurred over the moat at a bound, and the fugitives were chased out of the forest into the high-road towards Nottingham. The horsemen were armed with spears, but did not intend to do more than frighten those who were already sufficiently discomfited. In this they were quite successful. The men ran as hard as their legs could carry them to escape being captured, throwing off their bows and quivers, which impeded their flight. The chase was kept up until they came within sight of the walls of Nottingham, when the knight and his men returned.

Outside the walls, many of the townsfolk were enjoying a walk in the cool of the day. These were

amazed at seeing a number of men, in singular coloured garments, pursued by horsemen; and, as they drew near, were astonished to recognise the sheriff as the leader in the race. The men, not having had time to concoct a story, told different ones; but the true version leaked out, and was soon known to all the people; and the sheriff's race in a miller's garb, was long talked of and laughed over at the Saxon firesides in Nottingham.





CHAPTER XX.

Another Shooting Match at Nottingham—Little John is wounded, but escapes to Lea Castle—The Sheriff demands the Surrender of Little John—Sir Richard captured by the Sheriff—Rescue of the Knight by Robin Hood.



AFTER the events detailed in the last chapter, many quiet days were enjoyed at the castle and in the forest. On May-day, 1192, Robin's scouts brought word of another shooting match which was to be held in Nottingham, at which the prize was to be, as on a former occasion, a silver arrow with a gold head. On discussing the affair, it was determined that the whole of Robin's band should accompany him to see the sport. Robin selected five, who were the best shots, to take part in the match, the rest were to mingle with the crowd, and, if occasion required, assist the others. The five who were chosen to shoot were Little John, Will, Much, Scathelock, and Gilbert. The latter had joined the band in the course

of the winter, from a love of adventure. He was noted for the extreme whiteness of his hands, and was known by the name of Gilbert with the White Hand. He was an excellent marksman, but could not handle a quarterstaff with the skill of his brethren.

The sheriff had no suspicion that Robin would have visited him again that year, believing that, after so many narrow escapes, he would never venture into the town again. So he made no arrangements upon this occasion to capture him. He was very much astonished, however, when, on coming to the match, he saw several whom he strongly suspected must belong to Robin's band.

All the competitors shot once, and Will was the only one who had touched the wand that had been set up. Robin and his five associates never spoke to each other during the contest, but treated each other as strangers. The sheriff fancied he had discovered amongst these five the form of his old enemy Robin Hood ; and, notwithstanding his promises to the contrary, he could not resist the opportunity once more afforded him of making him a prisoner. Unobserved, as he thought, the sheriff gave orders to one of his attendants to call out a number of men, arm them with short swords, and return to the match as quickly as possible. The sheriff's words, however, had been heard by some of Robin's men, and very soon the information was communicated from one to the other. Meanwhile Robin and the others shot their arrows at the wand, and at last Robin was declared the winner.

A loud shout from the crowd confirmed the award of the prize.

The sheriff, to keep up appearances, summoned the crowd to form a circle ; and, after as much delay as possible, the arrow was presented. The delay just gave time for the arrival of the sheriff's force. As Robin turned away, after receiving the prize, the sheriff, allowing his zeal to get the better of his discretion, seized him by the neck, and called upon his men to close around. The moment the sheriff seized hold of Robin, he received a buffet on the back of his head, which made him instantly let Robin go. It was Little John who created this small diversion at the commencement of the affray. Turning to see who dealt the blow, the sheriff recognised the face of his old servant, and, laying hold of him by the neck, exclaimed, "Thou thief, Greenleaf, I have thee now !"

But the sheriff was too sure of his game. Little John, with a sudden twist, wrenched himself from the sheriff's grasp, then thrusting his head between that worthy's legs, he raised him in the air, and, with a strong jerk, pitched him backwards over the heads of the people. The people ducked as the sheriff's limbs went sprawling about their heads, and many a hard blow was received by the quiet onlookers before the sheriff came rather roughly in contact with the ground.

The signal, however, had been given, and the sheriff's men, drawing their swords, made towards where Robin stood, to capture him. But they were

outmatched by the forest band, both in numbers and skill. The sheriff, on rising to his feet, called out, "Take Robin to the jail," and then hobbled off as fast as he could to the friendly shelter of the nearest house.

Robin's men commenced a forward movement, to effect their escape. The crowd, remembering a similar fight in the same place, gave way quickly, and very soon the square was occupied with the two forces only.

Swords were crossed and vigorous blows exchanged; then the sheriff's men began to give way, and were pursued for some distance by Robin's band. At the sound of the horn they returned, and then made all the haste they could to get out of the town.

The sheriff directed a man to have the gates closed, but the common people prevented his object from being carried out. The porter was in the act of shutting the gate when the people came swarming up, and, frightened at the threats shouted out, he dropped the keys, and ran off to hide himself. Amongst the crowd here were two of Robin's men, who kept the passage clear for the egress of their friends.

On Robin's men returning from the pursuit, he gave orders to make for the nearest gate without delay. The sheriff's men, finding that the forest rovers were bent on escaping, armed themselves with bows, and fired at them from a distance, but none of them received a serious hurt. The shafts were

returned by the rovers, and many arms and legs were pierced. This firing was kept up until Robin's men reached the open gate. Before emerging into the open country, Robin directed them to fire a parting volley, which they did; but, in the exchange, an arrow from one of the sheriff's men lodged itself in Little John's left knee, causing him to fall to the ground. Four men instantly seized him by the arms, and dragged him through the gate, and along the open road for some distance. Then they halted, and Little John tried to stand, but the wound gave him such pain that he would have fallen to the ground again had not Will and Robin caught him in their arms. They were out of reach of a shaft from the walls, but not far enough to be out of all danger.

As Little John sank upon the ground, looking Robin in the face he said,—

“Master, have I served thee well since I have known thee?”

“Yes,” answered Robin, somewhat surprised at the question.

“Then,” said the wounded man, “take your bright brown sword and strike off my head; never let me fall alive into the hands of the sheriff of Nottingham.”

“Thou shalt never fall into the sheriff's hands so long as I am near thee,” said Robin; “but cheer up, man, thou art worth more than the sheriff and all his men yet.”

At the same moment a faint shout was heard in the direction of the town, and Robin fancied he saw a body of men coming through the gate.

Robin immediately ordered his men to place their bows under Little John's body. He was then raised upon the shoulders of a dozen stout men, and borne off in the direction of the forest as fast as they could walk. While these retreated under Robin's direction, Will and about a score of others remained where they were, to oppose any force that might be sent after them.

The men who had passed through the gate were seen forming outside the walls, and Will immediately gave orders to return towards the town, and give them a volley or two, for the sake of Little John. When they got within distance, they discharged a flight of arrows at the sheriff's men, which had an excellent effect upon them. They were seen to waver considerably, and then fairly broke and ran back to the shelter of the gate. Will then ordered his men to retreat slowly after Robin. On getting up to him, Will found that Little John's wound was a serious one, and that it had been resolved to convey him to Lea Castle, which was only a few miles distant.

On coming within sight of the castle, Robin blew a loud shrill blast upon his horn. Sir Richard recognised the signal, and before the party had reached the castle, the drawbridge was lowered, and the knight himself was standing ready to welcome his friends.

Robin told the story of the day's adventure, and besought shelter for his favourite follower. The knight declared that Little John should be nursed as one of his own children. Robin would have left the wounded man and retired with his men at once, but Sir Richard would not suffer it.

"You must all remain twelve days at the least," said the knight; "I will not hear of your return until the end of that time."

"That cannot be," replied Robin; "for there are those in the forest who may be exposed to danger while we remain here."

Said the knight's lady, "Robin knows he is full welcome to all this castle can afford. Let him stay or let him go as he listeth, he may be sure of this, that he is always welcome, and we will take care of Little John for his sake."

Still the knight pressed Robin to stay; and at length it was arranged that they should stay one night.

"We should eat you out of your castle, and bring a famine upon your house, were we to remain longer," said Robin; "for a hundred men a day, for twelve days, is no common entertainment for a king to provide."

"I have enough," replied the knight, "to outlast a long siege, with five times that number of men in the place."

"I fear," said Robin, "that your capabilities in that respect will ere long be tested; for if I mistake not that promise breaker, the sheriff of Nottingham will be here ere long to watch you day and night."

"The sheriff will meet with a warm reception," quoth the knight; "but he has not yet forgotten the entertainment we gave him in the moat, and will scarcely venture so soon."

The knight's lady was skilled in the treatment of wounds, and all sorts of diseases; and, while her hus-

band was holding Robin in conversation, devoted her attention to Little John. She had him conveyed to a soft couch, and then examined his knee. The head of the arrow had broken off short and remained in the wound. She withdrew the broken head without much difficulty, and then bathed the knee with water. After this, she applied a cooling lotion which she had prepared herself; and as soon as she had done, Little John fell into a deep slumber. One of her own maids was left to watch beside his bed, and the good lady left to attend to the wants of her other guests.

The men had refreshments served in the dining-hall, the knight, his lady, and their two sons sitting with them at table. When the feast was over, the lady's harp was brought and she played, while the choruses of her songs were taken up by the bold Saxons present.

On the following morning Robin visited Little John, and found him refreshed by his night's rest, but very weak from loss of blood. Two men were left to wait upon him, and the others took their departure with Robin for the Greenwood glade, where Marian, Ellen, and a few men, were anxiously awaiting their return.

To the surprise of the knight, Robin's anticipations with regard to the sheriff's visit were realised a few days after the departure of the forest band. The watch on the look out discovered a party of armed men coming from the direction of Nottingham. The sheriff was plainly seen riding at the head of the force, which numbered about two score men. This time the knight prepared no trick, but drew up his draw-bridge

and closed his heavy gates, stationing men on all parts of the walls to report what passed amongst the advancing force. The sheriff evidently meant mischief this time, for he came straight on towards the castle. Drawing the men up in two lines in front of the castle, he advanced, sounded a parley on a horn, and called loudly for the knight.

Sir Richard, who had been watching his proceedings through a niche in the gate, immediately ascended the castle wall and demanded to know the reason of the appearance of an armed band.

"We are come," said the sheriff, "to demand in the name of Prince John that Robin Hood and his men, who are now with you in this castle, be immediately delivered up bound for execution, as the law directs."

"Robin Hood is not here," the knight replied. "I wish he was, for then he would have come out himself and given his own answer. You know he is not here, or you would never have ventured with such a force to deliver so impertinent a message."

"Then I demand, in the Prince's name, that you instantly open your gates and suffer us to search for the men that Robin left behind him."

"That will I never do," responded the knight haughtily; "I defy you and the prince, too."

"You are a bold traitor," was the sheriff's response; "you have set the prince at defiance; the laws of the land have been openly violated by you, and the Prince shall know of your doings."

"I will answer to the king for what I have done,"

replied the knight; "but not to such traitors as you and Prince John."

The sheriff vowed he would besiege the castle, and hang every one within it.

The knight immediately held up a bucket, and made a movement as though he would have thrown the contents at the sheriff.

The sheriff, remembering his former experience, gave the knight no opportunity to fulfil his threat, but bolted as fast as he could to where his men were drawn up. After a short consultation with them, they all withdrew to the forest, and returned to Nottingham.

The sheriff sent messengers to Prince John to acquaint him with what had occurred, and asking for assistance to besiege the castle.

Prince John sent a message in reply, stating that in a short time he would visit Nottingham, and besiege the castle in person.

Before the return of this messenger from London, a change had, however, taken place in the state of affairs.

In the interval, believing that pursuit had dropped, the knight resumed his ordinary excursions into the forest, hunting or hawking, as had been his wont. This the sheriff came to hear, and he laid an ambush to capture him. Posting a number of men in the forest, the sheriff waited for the appearance of the knight.

One day the knight came, as expected, hawking, with only one attendant. His mind was wholly bent upon the sport, when suddenly he found himself sur-

rounded by a number of armed men. He was seized, dragged from his horse, and by the direction of the sheriff bound.

Seeing his enemy well secured, the sheriff declared he would hang him like a dog before the jail of Nottingham; and that Lea Castle and all his lands should be confiscated. The knight's hands were tied behind his back, to add to the indignity of his capture; and he was forced to walk beside the horse on which the sheriff rode. In this manner they entered Nottingham, where the sheriff locked the knight up in the common jail.

A few days before this event, Little John, whose wounds, under the care of the knight's lady, had been quite healed, left the castle for his forest home. Sir Richard had laden him with presents for the band, and had lent him one of his own horses and several attendants to do him honour. There was great joy amongst Robin's men at Little John's return, as he was a great favourite with all; and a feast was held, to celebrate his re-appearance among them, on the very day that the knight was so treacherously captured by the Sheriff of Nottingham.

The sheriff, however, was not destined to keep his prisoner long. Intelligence of what had happened was quickly borne to the castle by the old huntsman, who had accompanied his master to the field. The distance from the castle, however, was so great, that the sheriff was within sight of Nottingham before the huntsman reached the castle, so that instant pursuit was useless.

As soon as Lady Richard heard the intelligence, she ordered the fleetest horse in her stable to be got ready; and, accompanied by one of her men as a guide, she rode into the forest in search of Robin Hood. They were in the midst of their feast when she arrived, and were not a little astonished at the apparition. The two horses were covered with foam; and, on dismounting, she was so overcome as to be unable to speak for several minutes. In a few hurried words she at last told them what had happened.

Robin stamped his feet with rage on hearing the news.

"Who will go to the rescue?" he asked.

Instantly there was raised every hand in the air; and with one voice they shouted, "All of us! all of us!"

Robin bade them make ready without delay, and in a very brief space the whole band, leaving only a few behind, were on their way to Nottingham. They carried with them their bows and arrows and short swords; but over their dresses they wore the garb of beggars. Through the forest they hurried with eager steps, each one animated with the determination to rescue the knight.

The sheriff, having lodged his prisoner in the jail, gave orders for the erection of the gallows forthwith. Then repairing to his house, he ordered the dining-room to be made ready and some of the principal inhabitants summoned for the purpose of trying the offending prisoner. They were all seated together in the hall, and the prisoner was before them when the

messenger arrived from Prince John, acquainting the sheriff that he (the Prince) would undertake the capture of Sir Richard. This event upset the sheriff's arrangements. He was afraid to proceed with the trial and punishment of the knight, lest the Prince should be angry.

On being confronted with the sheriff, the knight demanded that he should be tried by a properly qualified tribunal, and not by base born townsmen. The haughty mien assumed by Sir Richard astonished the assemblage. The sheriff was obliged at length to order the further imprisonment of the knight, until the arrival of Prince John.

The jailer and his assistants immediately proceeded to bind the knight's hands behind his back, notwithstanding his indignant protests. Fortunately for himself the sheriff did not accompany his prisoner back to the jail, but left him to the care of his ruffian jailers. Round about the house there had assembled a crowd of people to see the knight brought out.

Robin and his men reached Nottingham during the time occupied with what the sheriff called an examination of the prisoner. It was evening, and their entrance into the town had been unobserved. Passing by the jail, they saw the gallows in course of erection; and wondered at the audacity of the sheriff in proceeding so far with his evil design. They gathered from their conversation with the people that Sir Richard was at that time at the house of the sheriff. Robin, therefore, despatched two men to make sure of the gate of the town; and with the rest

loitered about the jail until the prisoner's return. The people about the sheriff's house were mostly Saxons, whose pity had been excited by hearing of the capture of a Saxon knight for assisting Robin Hood and his men. The proud bearing of Sir Richard had still further won upon their feelings; and loud expressions of indignation at the treatment to which he was being subjected were heard by the knight as he walked along the streets on his way to the jail.

Sir Richard, however, was not prepared for the surprise that Robin had planned. On nearing the jail they found a great crowd blocking up the street. Seeing the people disinclined to make way, the head jailer waved his keys over his head in a threatening manner, but the next moment he found himself sprawling on his back, and his keys in the hands of one in the guise of a beggar. The crowd opened and closed again; but it was only to receive into its heart, as it were, the second jailer and the prisoner, who was held by him. This jailer was seized very roughly by the back of his neck, with such a severe pinch as made him open his mouth and eyes very wide. The fingers that inflicted this punishment were those of Little John, who felt that that was a favourable opportunity for paying off a certain grudge he owed some one of his many enemies in Nottingham. On being seized in this manner, the man let go the rope which held and bound the prisoner.

Sir Richard did not at first recognise his friends, until a voice, which he well knew, whispered in his

ear, "Now, fight for yourself!" and, at the same moment, he found his hands free. A sword was thrust into his hands, and he very quickly cleared a space for himself in the crowd by which he had been hemmed in. At first there were some indications of resistance on the part of a number of Normans who had accompanied the jailers. One of these attempted to lay hold of Sir Richard, but a short sharp blow from his sword severed three of his fingers; and the man retreated very quickly, holding his bleeding hand in the air.

On letting the rope go, the second jailer quickly found himself lying on the top of his fellow, the head jailer, and, before either could rise, many a Norman was thrown upon them.

Robin and his friends now found little trouble in making their way out of the crowd. The people assisted them, and greeted their efforts with loud applause; and when at last they saw Sir Richard and Robin Hood start off, followed by a number of their men, the very air was filled with shouts of gladness. Long before the sheriff heard of the release of the knight, the latter and his friends were again in the forest on their way to Lea Castle.

When the intelligence did reach the sheriff, he foamed with rage; and vowed that he would be revenged on Robin Hood, notwithstanding his promises to the contrary.

The jailers were in a pretty serious plight, for besides being half killed with the squeezing they had had, the sheriff fined them in a large sum for not

taking better care of their charge. To raise the requisite sum, the jailers put the screw upon the poor prisoners under their control.

Sir Richard, attended by Robin and his men, were on their way to Lea Castle, favoured by a glorious moon which bathed the whole forest in its soft pale light. On nearing the castle they left the cover of the forest, and the knight could hardly restrain his emotions as the ivy-mantled towers of his castle again burst upon his sight.

After the departure of Robin, Lady Richard had become very uneasy about the safety of her household; and accompanied by Marian returned, while the expedition were on their way to Nottingham, and anxiously awaited their coming, which it had been agreed should be to the castle, not to the glade.

The warder from the summit of one of the towers caught sight of the approaching force, and fancied he saw them waving their bows in the air. Lady Richard was soon made acquainted with the joyful news; but she could not even distinguish any of their forms. Marian's keen eyes discovered the force, however, and she confirmed the warder's intelligence that they were waving their bows in the air. Soon they came nearer, and then a faint shout was heard. It was the knight's voice, and his lady, recognising it, sank fainting by Marian's side. She quickly recovered, however, and went down to the gate, where, in a few moments, she was once more encircled by her husband's arms.

Robin and his men passed into the castle at the

invitation of Sir Richard ; and a right merry feast was set forward for their enjoyment. Far into the hours of night was the feast kept up ; and at early dawn, Robin and Marian, with their friends, started off for their forest home, rejoicing at the great success which had attended their hasty summons to assist their good friend, Sir Richard of the Lea.





CHAPTER XXI.

Robin's Adventure with two Monks—A Prayer Meeting in the Forest
—Robin meets with the Curtall Friar—The Hounds drive Friar
Tuck and Firepan into the Tree—Robin Contributes towards the
Release of King Richard.



SAID Robin, one morning, "bring me a beggar's cloak, for I shall go in search of an adventure."

Quoth Friar Tuck, "you have worn beggars' cloaks often, try a friar's gown to-day; there is luck in a friar's gown, though there is no luck in meeting a friar often."

Robin protested that a friar's gown would ill become him, that he should betray a cloven foot; but Much and Will chimed in with the Friar's suggestion, and Robin at length consented to cover his body with the garb of a sober friar. None laughed so heartily as Tuck, who further proposed that Robin should submit to have his head shaved, to complete the disguise. Robin, however, would not consent to that, but drew his hood over his head to hide his hair, and started forth into the forest. Through the forest he wandered with hands crossed over his breast, apparently in deep

meditation, looking like a seriously disposed friar bent on some errand of weighty import to a knight or prior. On through the forest he went, straight for the high road, where he knew if an adventure was to be had, he should meet with one. As he walked along the high road, he grasped his crucifix with his hands, or told his beads—but not with prayers—until, in this way, he had wandered some three miles.

To his joy, at length, he met with two lusty priests, clad in black, riding by themselves. The men were laughing and talking to each other, as though they had some merry piece of business in hand; and Robin saw at a glance that their saddle bags were well filled. Going up to them in the middle of the road, and standing in such a way that they could not help stopping, Robin crossed himself, and then cried, "Benedicite! Holy brethren, cross my hand with a small piece of silver, for the sake of our dear Virgin, Lady Mary. I have been wandering all this day in the high road, and through the forest, and have not met a single cottage whereat to get a bit of bread or a cup of water; and never a single passenger have I met with until our Lady Virgin blessed me with the sight of you."

As Robin spoke he stood close to the horses' heads, and just between the two. One monk, he noticed, had a red beard, and the other a black one.

Said Redbeard to Robin, "By our Holy Virgin, we have never a penny between us, for we were robbed this morning as we came along, and did not save one penny."

At this the other monk laughed aloud, and Robin knew by that they had not spoken the truth.

Robin, however, took no notice of their refusal, but, disguising his voice, continued to beg piteously for help. This was refused still more gruffly the second time, and at length Blackbeard called out to Robin to stand out of their way, or he would ride over him.

At this, Robin's voice and manner changed.

"You are both of you telling lies," he cried out, "and before we part I will see for myself what you have upon you."

Alarmed at Robin's manner, the monks gave their horses a blow with their heels, and the horses made a start; but Robin seized the monks, one in each hand, and giving a sudden jerk brought them to the ground. The sudden fall somewhat confused the men. On coming to themselves they found Robin standing over them with a short sword in his hand.

"This is rough treatment," said Redbeard; "what dost thou mean by assaulting us in this manner on the king's highway; by the Virgin, we will have thee punished for this." As he spoke, he sat on the ground, rubbing alternately his head and elbows.

Said Blackbeard to Robin, "Thou art the roughest beggar that ever I came across."

"Charity should have taught you both better manners," said Robin, "than to refuse a poor hungry friar help, when you meet with him on the king's highway."

With that he raised his arm, as though he would have struck off the monks' heads, when instantly they

began crying out for mercy, and vowing they would never refuse any one who besought their help again.

"That is well said," cried Robin ; "but as you have no money, how can you relieve those who solicit alms ? Therefore we will retire a short distance into the forest, and pray to the Virgin Mary to send us some money."

He then made the monks get up, and took hold of their gowns, lest they should attempt to run from him. They took hold of their horses ; and in this way he directed their walk into the forest for a considerable distance. When they were far enough away from the high-road as to be out of sight of any persons travelling along it, Robin made the monks tether their horses to a tree ; and in obedience to his further direction, down they kneeled with speed.

"Send us, oh, send us !" then, quoth they, "some money to serve our need."

Blackbeard prayed, in a deep bass voice of anything but a cheerful tone, while Redbeard prayed as though he was continually on the point of crying, and Robin sang his prayer right merrily. Thus, for an hour, Robin kept the monks upon their knees. Sometimes they would come to a sudden stop, when Robin would raise his sword, and immediately the words of the prayer were resumed. Once or twice they looked about them, as though they were meditating an escape ; but Robin perceiving it, sang still higher, laughing as he sang his prayer, and the monks, with woe-stricken faces, fixed their looks upon the ground again. When they lowered their voices

from weariness, Robin called upon them to speak up, or the Virgin would not hear; and so he kept them on their knees until completely worn out. Blackbeard wrung his hands, in vexation of spirit, while Redbeard shed tears. When Robin paused to take a rest, he spurred the others on, giving them no peace. Such an exercise in prayer the monks had not had for a very long time. After two hours had elapsed, quoth Robin—

“Do you two go on praying, and I will see whether any money has been sent us in answer to our prayers.”

With that he rose, and went to unfasten the saddle bags. In flinging them upon the ground, such a clinking sound proceeded from them as convinced Robin that their prayers had not been in vain. On seeing the bags on the ground, the monks stopped altogether; but Robin made them resume their chant,—“Lest,” said he, “the money is taken away from us again before we can call it our own.”

They obeyed Robin, but prayed in a sadly altered tone of voice; and so they continued, until Robin had opened the bags, and discovered that each contained a large sum of money in gold. Then he bade the monks cease their devotions. “Because,” quoth he, “a right good answer has been given to our prayers.”

In one saddle bag was £200 in gold, and in the other nearly the same amount.

“Now,” said Robin, after he had counted out the pieces, “let us see whether the Virgin has not been pouring some money into our pockets as well.”

The monks protested that it was no use searching them; and, thrusting their hands into their own pockets, they pulled them out again, and shook their heads, declaring that not a penny could they find.

Robin protested that the Virgin must have sent them something; for she never did things by halves when she began; so he proposed that they should search each other. Throwing up his arms, he bade the Blackbeard search him. At first he refused to do so; but Robin insisted, and his pockets were accordingly turned inside out. But not a penny was found. Then Robin searched both his friends, and upon each he found twelve more gold pieces.

On making this discovery, Robin was very wroth, and he upbraided them with their falsehood.

Quoth he, "I did intend that we should share equally the gold that hath been sent us, but now you shall have no more than two gold pieces each for spending money, and if that does not last you for your journey, then you may beg the rest; and as you have been charitable to others, so may you be charitably dealt with yourselves."

The monks said nothing in their own defence, but begged earnestly that they might have £5 for spending money, which Robin at length agreed to, because they had prayed so well for him. The monks sighed wondrously deep, as they saw Robin pack up the whole of the money, save their pittance, in one of the saddle-bags, and fasten it upon one of the horses, which he appropriated to his own use. Before parting, however, Robin insisted that the

monks should swear several oaths which he would administer. They were very unwilling to protract an interview which had resulted so unfortunately for themselves, but consented to the proposition for fear of worse things happening to them. They both knelt upon the grass, and joined hands. First, they swore they would never again speak other than the truth, wherever they were, whether journeying or at home. And, secondly, that they would never refuse a poor man who begged from them, if they had anything wherewith they could assist him. After they had taken these oaths, Robin suffered them to mount the other horse, and then, taking them by the hand, bade them each have more faith in prayer in the future than they had had in the past, and never tempt the Evil One by telling lies.

Robin returned to the Greenwood Glade, and, exhibiting his prize, to the admiration of all his men, related the manner in which he had obtained it.

"By the honour of my order," said Friar Tuck, "these monks were cowardly fellows to suffer you to ease them in that way; had one of them been the friar of Fountain Abbey you would not have come back with a whole skin."

"Who is the friar of Fountain Abbey?" Robin asked, with considerable disdain. "I fear no friar living."

Tuck shook his head doubtingly.

"He would beat thee first, bind thee afterwards, and then give thee to his dogs!"

"By my head I vow," exclaimed Robin, "that I

will see this same friar, and test his strength, and some of you shall be judges between us.

Fountain Abbey was delightfully situated, in the midst of a section of forest which was well stocked with deer and other animals suited for the chase. Many of the barons, knights, and bishops of the country were in the habit of visiting the abbey to hunt with the abbot; and a very large pack of well-trained hounds was kept for the use of the visitors. These dogs were under the charge of Friar Christopher, a man of great strength and gigantic stature. After a few days had elapsed Robin resolved to proceed to the abbey, with the determination to meet this man.

He put on his head a cap of steel, and fastened a broad sword to his side, while on his shoulders he carried a stout buckler, and there hung loosely from his back a quiver full of arrows. In his hand he carried his trusty bow. He arranged with his men that fifty of them were to accompany him through the forest so far as the high road adjoining the abbey, and then they were to remain in hiding until he summoned them by the sound of his horn. The men were all dressed in Lincoln green, and were armed with bows and arrows.

On reaching Fountain Abbey he saw the curtall friar walking by the side of the river. Had Friar Christopher known of Robin's coming he could not have been better prepared, for he also wore a cap of steel, and a broad sword by his side, while a stout buckler hung about his shoulders. At first Robin





suspected that Friar Tuck must have communicated with him ; but he dismissed the thought from his mind, as he had never had the slightest cause to doubt the friar's fidelity.

Robin rode down the hill side towards the friar, and then alighting from his horse, tied it to a thorn. Going up to the friar, he said,—

“Carry me over the water, thou curtall friar, or else mourn for thy life.”

The friar was much taller than Robin, and of stouter build, and when he heard Robin he stood still and laughed immoderately. Then Robin got vexed, and rattled his sword in its sheath as though he meant mischief.

Disdaining the signal which Robin gave, the friar unbuckled his sword and laid it down. Robin immediately did the same, and laid his bow and arrows down also.

Without saying a word, the friar then stepped into the water, and called out to Robin to jump on his back.

This he did with alacrity.

It so happened that there was only one ford over the river in a distance of several miles. The river was deep, though not very broad.

The friar stepped on to the ford with Robin on his back, and strode forward with as much ease as if he only carried a child on his back.

Robin saw, as the monk walked through the water, that the stream was deep on each side of them.

Forward the friar strode without a word, his sides

now and then shaking from the effect of some hidden convulsion, the outward manifestation of which would break forth again and again in spurts of laughter. In a few minutes he had reached the opposite side, and Robin leaped lightly down from his back.

Then the friar's manner changed.

"Now," said he, "it's your turn to carry me over, and if you don't comply it will breed you pain."

Robin immediately stepped into the water, and took the friar on to his back, but he was so heavy that Robin staggered under his weight before he had reached the middle of the water, and it was with difficulty that he managed to reach the opposite side. Having finished his task, Robin insisted that the friar should carry him over once more; and he, nothing loath, again took Robin up. But, coming to the middle of the river, the friar, with a sudden jerk, threw Robin head foremost into deep water.

The friar stood still while Robin floundered about, and, as he rose to the surface, laughed at him right heartily.

Robin swam ashore without any difficulty, but Friar Christopher reached the side first, and armed himself. When Robin reached the side he laid hold of his bow, and shot several arrows at the friar, who caught them on his shield very cleverly. Again and again Robin shot, but each time with the like result; and the friar called out derisively to shoot all day, and he would be the butt with pleasure. Robin continued to shoot until all his arrows were gone, and then they fought with their swords.

Here they were again equally matched. They fought until their swords struck out sparks of fire as they clashed, and caught blows upon their shields that, had they fallen upon their limbs, would have inflicted deadly wounds. For several hours they fought with their swords, neither of them seeming disposed to give way. At length, from sheer weariness, they both stopped, and stepped back from each other a few yards.

"Give me leave to blow a blast on this horn?" said Robin.

"Blow till your cheeks burst, for what I care!" replied the friar.

Whereupon Robin blew a loud blast upon his horn. For several seconds the echoes could be heard over the forest, and gradually died away in the distant hills. Before many minutes had elapsed there was a noise heard in the forest, and the next moment there came running out fifty men, all armed. They came up to Robin, saluted him respectfully, and asked him what he desired from them.

The friar looked very much surprised to see so many men.

"Whose men are these?" he asked.

"Mine," was Robin's reply; "and they have come to take you into the forest to shew you some strange sights."

"That shall they never do," replied the friar.

Immediately he set his fingers to his mouth, and blew three loud whistles. Robin and his men could not make out what the friar was after; but were not

kept long in suspense. There was, in a few seconds, the sound of a hound's voice ; then another, and another, until the air was filled with the echoes of their voices. Over a hill, on the opposite side of the river, came the hounds ; and then, to the astonishment of the forest rovers, they counted no fewer than fifty hounds. They swam across the river, and leaped about the friar, licking his hands, as though rejoiced to meet him.

"Now," exclaimed the friar, "here is a dog apiece for your men, and I am for you ; so fall to, lads."

At the same time the friar pointed the dogs to the men ; and, as though they knew what was intended, the dogs flew towards Robin's friends. Each man hastily drew an arrow, fitted it to his bow, and fired ; but the dogs had been so well trained that they caught the arrows in their mouths, and carried them to the friar. The men shot at the dogs again and again, but with the like wonderful result. Robin looked on in wonder and admiration at the strange sight, and was much puzzled what to do. At length Little John shouted out to the friar to call his dogs away, or he would kill them all. The friar laughed in reply. Little John spoke aside to Will, and immediately they both fired at the same dog. The dog caught one as before, but the other pierced his side, and he fell dead. Seeing the success of this plan, the others imitated their example ; and in a very short time they slew, in this manner, about twenty of the dogs. When the friar saw this, he called out to the men to cease firing, and he and

Robin would agree. The men did so very gladly, because they admired the skill of the dogs, and were unwilling to slay them.

Advancing to where Robin stood, the friar bowed his knee, in courtesy, and Robin bade him have no fear of his men ; for they had only come to see a brave friar, of whom they had heard much.

Friar Christopher was very much concerned for the loss of his dogs, and declared that it was as much as his life was worth to go back to the abbey without them.

Whereupon Robin begged him to return with them to Sherwood, where he would have many opportunities of trying his dogs ; and for himself he would be heartily welcome.

Said Little John, " We have one of your cloth there already, and a famous good fellow he is, either to cook a joint, or draw a cork."

The friar appeared to hesitate for one moment ; but looking on the bodies of his hounds, he gave consent.

Said Robin,—“ No one shall be more welcome. You began this day by giving me a cold bath ; but we will close it with a merry feast."

Calling his dogs together, the friar accompanied Robin and his men into the forest, in the direction of the Greenwood Glade. As they walked together, Friar Christopher made many inquiries about Friar Tuck ; and at length he declared that they were old friends, and at one time had lived together in the same abbey. Robin frankly stated that it was entirely

owing to what Friar Tuck had said that they had met that day; and that the blame of what had happened—if any one deserved censure—attached to Friar Tuck. Friar Christopher, on hearing this, declared he would be even with his brother Tuck for sending him such a visitor. He called one of his dogs, tore off a piece of his robe, shewed it to him, and then motioned him forward.

At this time those left behind in the general reception glade were very busily engaged preparing for a grand feast against the return of Robin and his men. Tuck's services were in special requisition on this occasion. He was tasting some newly-brewed beer when a deer-hound broke in, and ran up to him.

The friar called to the dog affectionately, and in a coaxing tone of voice; but the dog began jumping about him, and barking in a manner that alarmed the fat friar very much. Tuck began to feel very nervous; coaxing words seemed to have no effect upon the dog, which continued its antics, jumping round him in a circle, nearer and nearer, then up at his face, in a very threatening manner. At first, the friar fancied that the dog wanted something to eat, and called to Firepan, who was turning a spit of venison over a fire, to cut a slice, and throw it to the animal. Firepan complied with the request, and cut a morsel that he was sure would tempt any sensible dog. He flung it towards the animal, which turned aside for a moment, but, without touching the meat, immediately returned to the friar, and continued its strange gambols.

"The dog's mad," exclaimed Firepan ; " throw your beads over him."

Unfortunately the friar had left his beads in the glade-house ; but raising his hands, he gave the dog his blessing, and charged it to leave him. The creature, however, took no heed of the pious action resorted to, and, with a sudden bound, it seized the bottom part of the monk's gown, and tearing a long piece off in his teeth, bounded away into the forest, and was quickly lost to sight.

The friar looked aghast at the rent made in his robe. He took the tattered ends up very daintily in his fingers, as though afraid of venom in the touch, and examined them closely.

"This is most extraordinary, Firepan," he exclaimed.

But before he had done examining his dress, another dog of the same breed, but differently marked, came bounding in, and, like his predecessor, ran up to the friar. He, too, began skipping round the astonished monk, just as the first had done. This second appearance completely upset the friar's gravity.

Firepan started to his feet on seeing the second dog gamboling about the friar, ran to the nearest tree, scrambled up into it, and called upon the friar to imitate his example without delay. From the branches, he watched with considerable anxiety the progress of events below.

The second hound kept running round the monk in circles, who kept turning, as on a pivot, so as to face the dog. This performance was varied by the dog

making an occasional spring towards the friar, who tried to keep it off by making use of all sorts of tender phrases supposed to be understood by the canine creation. All this time the friar kept the ends of his gown in his hands; but when the dog once came nearer than before to the friar's face, he dropped his dress in alarm; instantly the dog seized the gown with his teeth, and tore off a large strip, with which he ran off into the forest.

Freed once more, Tuck looked up to where Firepan was quietly sitting amongst the branches of the trees, as if he meant to follow. But the good man was rather giddy with so much turning, and was slower in his movements than he should have been. He made a step towards a tree which seemed to afford easy means of ascent; but, before he reached it, there was a slight crash amongst the leaves and brambles, and a third hound made its appearance. This fellow had a black and white tail, and was different to both the others. Up to where the friar stood he bounded, and, springing at him with considerable eagerness, caught the offending garment in his teeth, and, stripping off a long piece, started off again into the forest.

This third visitant completely upset the friar's confidence. He dashed at the tree in which Firepan was seated, and called out to him to give him a lift with his hand. The friar, however, was not so nimble a climber as the cook, and whilst he was struggling to get up, a fourth dog bounded into the place, and laying hold of the tattered fragments of the friar's gown,

tore the gown away from his shoulders, leaving the poor fellow with only the front half. The friar, excited by the dog's barking, worked his knees, legs, and arms so skilfully as to reach a place of security in the tree beside Firepan.

Yet another, and another dog bounded into the glade, after the friar had attained his elevated position. These last appeared to be very much irritated at his escape, and barked loudly, and sprang up to try to catch hold of him.

"Friar," said Firepan, "I tell you what it is, Robin and his men have been turned into dogs by some witchcraft, and these are only come to fetch you to where the rest are, to break the spell."

"They've taken enough of my gown away to effect their purpose, I hope," said the friar. "If there is any virtue in a friar's gown, I believe Robin will find it in mine; but now that I'm out of their way, I don't mean to get down again until I am winded."

Before many minutes had elapsed fresh dogs arrived, until there was six of them jumping up and barking at the two men in the tree. The friar, being out of danger, half inclined to the belief that some spell of witchcraft had been worked upon Robin and his party, and resolved to try what talking to the brutes would do, he urged the dogs to go to the spits of venison and help themselves, as the meat was done to a turn; or draw the bungs from the barrels of beer, and take a good draught, which he vowed was an excellent cure for a disordered mind.

The hounds, however, paid no heed to his words,

but kept on their insane game of leaping and barking.

The friar had left his horn with his beads, and Firepan had let his fall to the ground in scrambling up the tree, so that they were unable to summon assistance from the Greenwood-tree Glade, where some further cooking operations were being carried on. So there was no help for them but to sit where they were until relieved by some one, or until the spell had worked itself off.

Seeing that he had a portion of his gown remaining, Firepan suggested that the friar should cast it to them, which he did, and no sooner had it fallen to the ground than the hounds tore it to pieces, and started off into the forest with the fragments.

No more dogs came, but in a few minutes there was heard in the forest the sound of human voices, evidently very merry. The friar trembled in every limb, because he recognised the voice of Robin above the others; and he could not divest his mind from the belief that the men had been bewitched. Firepan shared the friar's opinion, and his teeth chattered in his head as he saw Robin and his men enter the open space from the same direction that the dogs had come.

The friar called out, "Robin Hood, is that you?" and without waiting for an answer continued, "are you safe in every limb? Did the gown do the trick for you? How did it happen? Why couldn't the dogs have spoken, and then I would not have kept you waiting so long?"

Robin looked up at the strange birds in the tree, and burst out into excessive laughter, in which all his men joined.

"Why, what in the name of all the saints are you doing up there?" inquired Robin.

"Why," said the friar, "I don't exactly know; but if those cursed hounds had only spoken, I would have come to you myself."

"And I, too," said the cook, "would have come; but we could not make out what they wanted at first."

"Are you both mad?" quoth Robin. "I never saw two such care crazed scarecrows in all my life. Come down, for goodness sake, and give us some dinner."

Down they came in obedience to the summons, but evidently afraid lest Robin and his friends should turn into hounds again; nor could the friar be persuaded that it really was Robin, until he had felt him with his hand. Robin laughed immoderately, and so did his men, at the fright of Tuck and Firepan. When both had reached the ground, and were somewhat recovering their composure, Robin sounded a whistle, and immediate the noise of hounds was heard, and the very same dogs that had caused so much alarm came bounding into the place. No sooner did Firepan and Tuck catch sight of the first, than they bounded off to the nearest tree, and were only prevented from climbing it by force. The men roared with laughter; and some of them rolled helplessly on the ground in the excess of their merriment. Following the hounds came the Friar Christopher,

who walked up to Tuck, and laughing heartily, bade him send his friends no more such rough visitors as Robin Hood. The friar at once saw that a trick had been played upon him, and insisted that his brother should share his gown between them. Friar Christopher said Tuck was welcome to it, if he could take it from him, but the latter knew better than to try.

They were all very merry over dinner, and the story of the joke played upon Tuck was told to the whole company amid merriment, in which Tuck very heartily joined.

Some weeks after this event, as Robin and a party of his men were walking through the forest they met with a number of the king's officers, and from them they learned that Richard was a prisoner on the continent, and that a heavy ransom would have to be paid to effect his release. Robin and his band immediately resolved to subscribe £500 towards the redemption-money; and that sum was handed over to the king's officers by Robin at the close of a grand feast, which was given in their honour. The officers declared that the king should know how generously Robin had contributed towards his release.





CHAPTER XXII.

King Richard visits Nottingham, and goes into Sherwood—His Meeting with Robin—He pardons Robin, and they enter Nottingham together—Robin and his men are installed in the Castle—The Death of Richard—The Discovery of the Branded Arrow, and Death of Gammer.

KING RICHARD was released from captivity February, 1194, and arrived in England on March 13 of the same year. Three days after his arrival in this country he came to Nottingham. Prince John was then in possession of the castle, which he had taken forcible possession of from the regents of the kingdom. On the arrival of the king the castle surrendered. On his reaching Nottingham the sheriff took an early opportunity of laying before him an account of the tricks Robin Hood was continually playing upon the king's liege subjects, robbing them of their money, beating them with staves, stripping them, and causing them to lie upon the bare ground all night, and forcing his way into the town, and killing the officers.

The king listened in silence. He had heard from his officers of the handsome contribution that Robin had sent him, and was in no way disposed to adopt harsh measures towards him.

The sheriff, after telling his story, introduced Gruff and several of his foresters, who also told the king a very sorrowful tale of the manner in which the deer were shot by Robin and his men, and how the herds were becoming thinner and fewer every year.

“By my head,” said the king, “you are all of one compact against this Robin Hood ; but I will pay no heed to your stories, but go into the forest and see with my own eyes what this man hath done amongst the herds.”

The sheriff urged the king to take with him the strongest regiment of soldiers he had in Nottingham, as Robin had proved himself more than a match for the strongest force that had hitherto been sent against him.

The king approved of this, and directed the governor of the castle to get a number of men ready to accompany him. The day for the expedition had been fixed, and Robin was made acquainted by his scouts with what had been determined upon.

Several days before the time appointed a very trivial incident diverted the king from his purpose. Friar Christopher was despatched to Nottingham, with instructions from Robin to send a message to the king, respectfully informing him that he would meet the king, if he would come alone and unarmed into the forest ; but that if he brought any soldiers

with him Robin and the whole of his band would depart for a season. The friar repaired to St Anne's Well, where he chanced to meet a little girl who was waiting for some one to assist her to draw water. This the friar did, and while still engaged in conversation with the child, one of Robin's men came up, as previously arranged, and addressing the friar, said,—

“Holy man, Robin Hood saith let the king come unarmed and alone into the forest, and he and all his band will submit themselves to him; but if the king comes with soldiers, they may search for a year and never find one of the forest rovers.”

Having delivered this message the man instantly retired; and a few minutes afterwards there came sauntering to the spot one of Richard's soldiers, to whom the friar communicated Robin's message, which was confirmed by the little girl.

Hereupon the soldier brought the friar and the child before the king, to whom the message was repeated.

The king immediately determined to accept Robin's proposal, and bade the friar communicate to Robin that the king consented. Without saying a word to any one, the king, on the following day, disguised himself in the dress of a monk, and boldly entered the forest. After wandering about for several miles he was met by Little John, who asked him whither he went?

The king replied, that he was afraid of being robbed on the high road, that he was going to Nottingham on an errand to the king, and was in a great

hurry. He begged Little John to shew him the way, if he knew it.

Little John declared that he must not think of returning just then, because there was one in the forest who begged the honour of his company to dinner.

The king protested against any such discourtesy being practised upon him, but Little John was firm, and the king, after a slight shew of unwillingness, consented.

Robin was expecting, besides the king, to have the company of Sir Richard, of Lea Castle, who had offered to give shelter to a portion of Robin's band, if they would accept it, until the king had left Nottingham.

Little John led his companion to the place where it had been arranged the king should be entertained. Robin lay at the foot of an old oak, silently pondering over his future plans. Friar Tuck and about eight others were present, the remainder being dispersed throughout the forest, to look out for the king and Sir Richard.

At the very moment of the king's arrival Sir Richard made his appearance, and received a hearty greeting from Robin. The king stood silently by, without speaking, and Friar Tuck, seeing a brother present, exchanged such civilities with him as he was master of.

The knight threw himself beside Robin on the grass, and they began talking of King Richard's doings in Nottingham, in a tone of voice loud enough for the king to hear.

Sir Richard was endeavouring to assure Robin that the king would do him no harm, and that it was owing to some slander of the Sheriff of Nottingham that had made the king think of getting up an expedition into the forest to capture Robin and his band.

At length, Little John, beckoning the king to follow him, stepped before Robin, and, making a low bow, told him that he had found the monk wandering in the forest, and that he had stated he was on his way to the king, for whom he had a message.

"Thou art right welcome, man," said Robin; "but cast back the hood which covers thy face, and let us see if we know thee."

"Let him do it who dares," replied the king.

"Ah, ah, ah!" laughed Robin, "it will not take long to do that."

So saying, he rose from the grass and proceeded to throw back the hood, which covered the king's head and face in such a way as to hide his features. As he raised his hand, however, he received such a buffet from the king's arm as sent him tumbling backwards over the knight.

"That was a mighty strong blow," Little John exclaimed; "perhaps thou wilt be good enough to repeat the dose?"

He immediately stepped up to the king, and raised his arm to put back the hood, but in an instant a similar blow sent him also sprawling on the grass. The force with which the blow was delivered effected the purpose Robin had desired, for the hood fell from the king's face.

The knight had risen to his feet, and was looking into the face of the king with a puzzled expression on his countenance. In a moment he recognised the features, and kneeling bareheaded before his monarch, exclaimed, "God save King Richard!"

Robin and Little John were startled by the knight's words; they doffed their caps instantly, and kneeling before him, besought his pardon for their rudeness.

"Rise," said the king, "do not kneel to me here." Then turning to Robin Hood, he added, "I have heard much of thee; thou hast slain my deer these many years, beaten my foresters, and slain them too, opposed the Sheriff of Nottingham, played tricks upon fat bishops and gouty barons, and now I have come to summon thee to a reckoning."

"My lord," Robin said, "no man can say I ever robbed a poor man, injured a woman, or despoiled the widow and the fatherless. I have taken from rich abbots, but I have given to the deserving, from whom they exacted too much. I have beaten the foresters, and slain them too, but they first slew my father, and my mother, and my wife's father, and many others of whom I might speak. I have opposed the Sheriff of Nottingham, because he took vows and broke them, made promises and violated them, and those who suffered with him were like him. But, my lord, there is one thing thou hast not remembered in the catalogue of my sins. I met thy exchequer men carrying a rich booty to London, wherewith to pay a monarch's ransom, and I contributed to that ransom out of what I had. It has

not been against the king that I have fought, but against his unworthy servants,—men who, in some authority, fattened themselves upon the substance of the poor and needy. All that I have wronged the king in, has been in helping myself to a few of his deer for myself and my men.”

“Say no more,” replied the king; “I forgive thee and thy men for all that has been done against me; and for what thou hast done to the bishops, the priors, and the barons, I thank thee from my heart.”

On hearing these words Robin put his horn to his mouth and blew three loud blasts, such blasts as made the forest echo again and again.

Friar Tuck, on hearing the salutation of Sir Richard, had fallen upon his knees by a fire over which some venison was roasting, and continued for some time turning the spit with one hand, and crossing himself with the other, as though he anticipated nothing short of death for the crimes of which he had been guilty.

Shortly after the sound of the horn had died away, there came running in, led by Will, five-and-twenty men all dressed in Lincoln green, who came straightway up to where Robin stood, and made a bow before him. Then five-and-twenty ran in led by Alan; afterwards, two other files of the same number under Much and Scathelock; and finally, there came in the curtall friar with his hounds. The friar recognised the king, but on a motion from him was silent.

The king watched with some astonishment the several files of men come trooping in.

“I declare that these men obey thee more willingly,

and with more joy, than do mine obey me," said the king to Robin.

When all had entered Robin, pointing to the king, exclaimed,—

"Let every man who loves his country and his king say with me, 'God save King Richard!'"

The men seemed to be taken completely aback. They took off their caps, and, waving them in the air, shouted with all their might, "God save King Richard!" Then cheer after cheer rent the air.

The king's countenance changed at the reception he received, and he gave Robin and Little John each a friendly buffet on the shoulder.

When the feast was ready, Robin sent for Marian and Ellen, and presented them to the king, who, as he looked upon their faces, exclaimed, "By my head they are comely dames!"

They sat down on the grass to the feast, and Robin with Little John waited on the king. They had roast venison, river fowl, and flesh of several sorts; besides good bread, old wine, and strong ale.

The king ate heartily, and was very merry over the feast. He told them strange stories of his adventures in the Holy Land, and of his sufferings in captivity.

When the feast was ended, the king filled a horn with wine, and calling upon all present to do likewise, proposed "Long life to Robin Hood and his merrie men!"

Then Robin filled another horn, and called upon his men to drink "Long life to King Richard!" which

they did with such zest as to make Friar Christopher's hounds bark in chorus.

After the feast was ended, Robin ordered the wands to be set up, that they might shew the king some true forest play.

Two wands were accordingly set up, and a garland hung on the side of each; whoever missed the wand, and went outside the garland too, was to receive a buffet from the man who had preceded him.

When the king saw the distance measured, he declared that it was too long by fifty paces.

Robin immediately placed an arrow to his bow, and firing struck the wand, whereat the king clapped his hands.

One after the other of Robin's men shot, and whenever one missed the wand and the garland beside, he had to receive a buffet. These buffets were delivered without mercy, and sometimes knocked the unfortunate marksman over, which caused much laughter.

Once Robin missed the mark, and went up to the king to receive a buffet, which was administered with such force as sent Robin reeling against the nearest tree.

After shooting at the wands for some time, the bows were laid down, and then the men fell to with quarterstaves. They exhibited such skill in the use of these as astonished the king.

When this game was finished, the king proposed that Robin and his men should go with him into Nottingham, where he declared he would have no other body-guard so long as he remained; and when he

left, they should all be provided for at the castle as long as they chose to remain in his service.

Robin and all his band swore that they would never leave the king's service so long as he reigned. Sundry effects were packed up immediately upon the backs of the horses, and they all prepared to accompany their royal master to Nottingham. A fairer display had never been seen, and as Robin rode by the king's side, the latter declared that Robin had better men under him than he had been able to obtain himself.

Robin, to beguile the time, told the king what first led him to adopt a forest life, and recounted the principal adventures he had had. The recital of these stories kept the king in a merry mood.

The arrival of Robin Hood and his men created quite a panic in Nottingham amongst the Normans. The sheriff ordered all the abbey bells to be rung, and the governor of the castle beat up a strong force of soldiers to repel the rude force that had ventured into the town. There was no mistake about the force; every man wore the well-known Lincoln green; even the king wore a garb like the others, and so for a time escaped recognition. The people ran hither and thither, uncertain and alarmed, not knowing what was about to happen.

While all these things were transpiring, the force that had given rise to all the alarm quietly marched into the town.

This terrible fact was communicated to the sheriff without delay, who forwarded a messenger to the governor. The castle soldiers were being ranged in

the square at the time when the last item of intelligence was forwarded to them. Before the final arrangements were made, other messengers came with the most conflicting and contradictory reports. One said that Robin had advanced to the market-square without opposition, and was on his way to the castle; another declared that he was on the point of hanging the sheriff and setting the town on fire.

The news of Robin's presence in the city spread among the Saxons like wildfire; old and young, men and women, lame, halt, and blind, poured out into the streets to welcome him. On every side there rose loud and hearty cheers, the people shouting his name aloud. When the cavalcade reached the square, there was a halt for a few moments, and then some people found out that the stranger who rode silently by Robin's side was no other than the king; and when this was made known, there was such a burst of cheering heard as had not been raised to welcome the king when he first entered the town. Strong voices shouted out, "God save King Richard and Robin Hood!"

The cry was taken up from street to street, and rolled upon the air with increasing power and volume, until the soldiers in the castle caught the sound, and the governor grew mightily alarmed. He was a cautious man, however, and would not fling his soldiers away. The enemy was close at hand, so the drawbridge was kept up, the gates closed, and the walls bristled with armed men.

Straight on the cavalcade came, right in the direction of the castle, and on coming near, the king's voice

was heard, calling on the governor to let the draw-bridge down and admit him and his friends.

The governor recognised the king's voice, and immediately ordered the bridge to be lowered. Bare-headed in the gateway stood the governor, who looked up at Robin with evident surprise as he swept by him, followed by all his men. Marian and Ellen were also amongst the number following in the procession, and the curtall friar with his hounds.

The following day the king sat in council, and behind his chair stood Robin Hood and Little John, while round about the room were a number of Robin's men.

Amongst those present at the council were the Bishop of Hereford and the Abbot of St Mary's, York, and many others, with whom Robin had sported at one time or another as they journeyed through the forest. These looked amazed when they saw Robin standing behind the king's chair, and whispered amongst themselves, wondering what it could mean.

At length the Abbot of St Mary's rose and told the king openly that the notorious robber of Sherwood Forest was present, and urged the king to order his instant imprisonment.

The king, however, spoke up in defence of Robin, and rebuked the abbot for discourtesy to his retainers, and harsh treatment of those who held lands under him ; and he vowed that, when he wanted more money to carry on a war, he would have a close examination made of the strong chests in all the religious houses.

When the others who had been eased by Robin of their superfluous wealth heard this, they were silent and confused, and nothing more was said in the presence of the king about imprisoning Robin.

So long as the king remained in Nottingham, he would have no other guard about him but Robin and his men. They accompanied him in his excursions about the town, and were present at all the public ceremonies in which the king took part. Before leaving Nottingham, he gave orders to the governor of the castle to admit Robin and his men as members of his garrison.

There were many of Robin's band, however, who refused to enter the service of the king as regular soldiers, and they were allowed to go wherever they chose unmolested.

Robin was now installed in the castle, and entered upon the service of a regular soldier with all the zest of which his nature was capable.

The Saxons of the town plucked up courage when Robin became a resident among them, and the sheriff contented himself with grumbling.

Some weeks after the departure of the king, Prince John came to Nottingham and paid a visit to the castle.

The governor received him with all the attention due to his rank, but was not a little annoyed at the prince telling him bluntly that he did not want to have anything to do with him, but only Robin Hood.

To Robin the Prince shewed such remarkable attention, as to cause it to become the topic of con-

versation in the castle. Robin quickly discovered the design of the prince. The day of the prince's departure, Robin and he were alone on one of the towers of the castle, when Prince John asked him how he would like to be governor of the castle.

Robin, in reply, said he was anxious to show his love to the king in any way the king might think fit.

This was not exactly what the prince wanted, so he spoke more openly.

The day might come, the prince observed, when events would take place in the kingdom similar to those that had recently happened, and if he could rely upon Robin's assistance at that time, he should be governor of the castle for life as a reward.

Treachery was no element in Robin's character, and when he understood fully what the prince meant, he declared that he would rather lose his life than betray the trust of one who had befriended him.

On hearing this, the prince flew into a great rage, and swore that he would teach Robin such a lesson for his impertinence, as he would never forget.

He immediately left the castle without sending word of his departure to the governor.

The sudden leaving of the prince caused some surprise, and Robin at first felt inclined to disclose what had taken place, but after a little consideration he resolved to keep it secret, lest it might lead to further sorrow in the kingdom.

Several years passed, and Robin still maintained his position in the castle, having won the respect and

friendship of all, from the governor to the commonest soldier in the place. In the years that passed, Robin never forgot the little interview he had had with Prince John.

One day, in the year 1199, while Robin was on duty at the principal gate, there came a messenger in hot haste from the sheriff, asking to see the governor.

"He is not in the castle," replied Robin.

"Then I must see the lieutenant-governor," the man said.

"I am he," responded Robin.

"The sheriff bade me say, that thou must not allow Robin Hood to leave the castle on any account, or thou wilt lose thy head ; for Richard is dead, and Prince John is now king."

This intelligence rather startled Robin, but after a little reflection, he resolved at once to leave the castle with such men as chose to accompany him. In the course of the five years which had elapsed since his entrance, the number of his men had rapidly thinned. They were averse to the regular life which they had to lead, so one after the other left, but all in perfect friendship with Robin.

"Good-bye, dear master," they would say ; "and may the day soon come when we shall all meet again in the forest."

Amongst the principal of those who remained with him were—Little John, Will, Alan, Much, Scathelock, and the Friar Tuck. The brothers Cobble went to live in one of the villages bordering on the forest.

Robin sought the first opportunity of communicating his resolution to his men.

On the governor's return to the castle, Robin asked for leave of absence, which was immediately granted ; and he left with Marian the same hour.

Said Little John to Will, " I shall be heartily glad to be out of this castle ; I am sick of the confinement, and, methinks, there is yet left in my quiver, that hangs in my cell, a few arrows that I had in the forest before we came, that shall do good service amongst the deer.

The quiver was brought, and he shewed to Will the identical arrows that he had taken from the sheriff's quiver, that hung in his house, on the occasion of his short service with that functionary. Other arrows had been manufactured in the castle for their use, but these had been preserved as mementoes of his merry adventures in former times.

In the evening of the day that Robin left, all the others managed to follow his example ; and they met at a spot agreed upon in the forest.

On getting clear of the town, all Robin's love of freedom returned ; and when he was joined by his comrades, he and Marian declared they would never again reside in the castle. They bent their steps instinctively towards the Greenwood Glade ; and Robin celebrated their arrival there by giving three loud blasts upon his horn. They found both houses in a capital state of preservation, and there was little doubt that they had remained undisturbed since they had quitted them, on the occasion of King Richard's

visit. They lost no time on their arrival in getting things ready for a lengthened sojourn, and laid in stores of provisions as in former times.

The very same day that Robin escaped into the forest, the governor heard of the death of Richard; and three days afterwards, there came a messenger from London, who had been travelling night and day, bearing instructions from King John for the immediate seizure of Robin.

From this the governor discovered that, by some unaccountable means, Robin must have heard of the king's death; and, though very much against his inclination, he felt obliged to order out a company of men to go in pursuit of Robin. The soldiers scoured the town in every direction, and then searched the borders of the forest; but in vain, they could neither see nor hear anything of the famous rover, whom the new king so much disliked. Some days after the arrival of the king's messenger at Nottingham, a company of soldiers made their appearance, who had been dispatched to take Robin and his men prisoners to London. When they came, a second expedition was sent into the forest, but it met with no better success than the first.

The escape of Robin soon got bruited about in the town, and was conveyed to the neighbouring villages. Robin's men heard of it with the greatest joy, and forthwith prepared to tender their allegiance. They knew very well how to find him, and although the governor offered a large reward for Robin's capture, no one ventured to betray him then. After several

days had elapsed, the governor directed the soldiers to return to London, and report Robin's escape.

Sir Richard, hearing of his danger and escape, was one of the first to meet him in the forest, and offer assistance and shelter in case of need.

Robin thanked the knight for his courtesy, but declared that he was safer in the forest than in any castle, and could rely upon a sufficient number of men at any time, when he chose to meet his enemies in a pitched battle.

The knight, however, persuaded Robin to accept large quantities of provisions, besides arms for his immediate use.

Within a fortnight of Robin's arrival, more than sixty of his men presented themselves, and would have remained with him in the forest, had he consented. He directed them to return to their homes for the present, get as large quantities of food as they were able, and revisit him at a future day.

While the soldiers were searching the forest, Robin and his men kept very close in the Greenwood Glade, where he knew they were safe from discovery. They spent their time fashioning new weapons, and arranging plans for the future. Robin found out that the Sheriff of Nottingham had been affording the soldiers all the aid in his power; and he declared that the sheriff should repent of his conduct very speedily.

King John was excessively annoyed at Robin's escape from his clutches; and believing that the governor had favoured his retirement from the castle, he sent down a new man to supersede him. On his

arrival, fresh expeditions were planned, and the forest scoured day after day, but without meeting with Robin. At length, wearied out with his exertions, the governor sent up such a report to the king as induced him to believe that Robin had left that part of the country altogether.

After the soldiers had been withdrawn from the forest Robin summoned his band together, and they hunted the king's deer as in former years, but with considerably more eagerness, on account of their long abstinence.

Shortly after their re-settlement in the forest they had a shooting match. Little John said to Robin he would try one of the sheriff's arrows, and taking a second out of his quiver he invited Robin to fit it to his bow.

Robin took the proffered arrow in his hand, and, looking at it for an instant, recognised the fatal brand upon it, corresponding with the one he had carried in his quiver so long, and which he had drawn from his father's body.

"Little John," said he, "thou hast made a discovery for me I have sought to make for myself yet in vain these many years. Here," he continued, drawing an arrow from his quiver, "if I mistake not, is the fellow of that arrow of thine."

Little John took the broken weapon from Robin's hand, and examining it closely, saw that the marks upon them corresponded exactly.

"I cannot understand thee," said Little John; "this arrow is branded in the same way as that of

mine, but this is spliced, and yet thou hast been carrying it in thy quiver."

"That arrow," Robin replied, "I drew from my father's body after he was shot in the forest. It was broken in his side, and this piece is still stained with his blood."

Robin pointed out to Little John the blood upon the arrow which he held in his hand.

Said Little John, "Master, if I had only known this I would have slain the sheriff in his own house."

"It is well thou didst not," Robin replied, "for no hand but mine must revenge my father's death. Thou hast done me a good service in tracing out this mystery for me. I want no further evidence. Now I am astonished that I never before suspected the sheriff of the crime of murdering my father."

Looking Little John earnestly in the face, Robin, after a pause, added, "The sheriff's days are now numbered; I vow I will take no rest until I have slain him."

Without saying a word to any of the rest of the band, Robin immediately set forth alone on his way to Nottingham. He flatly refused to allow Little John to accompany him, and forbade his mentioning to any one the purpose he (Robin) had in view in going to town.

On his way, Robin heard that one of his men had been captured by some of the sheriff's men, and was going to be hung immediately. Robin instantly sounded his horn, and very shortly Little John made his appearance with twenty of the band. They were

instructed to disguise themselves as quickly as they could, and follow their leader to Nottingham.

While the men were busily engaged making up disguises Robin went on in advance. He found the town in a great uproar, by reason of the execution that was about to take place.

"If Robin Hood was here the man would never be hung," Robin heard some people saying as he walked along.

Robin found that the gallows was erected, and a great crowd, as usual, assembled in front of the jail. He heard that the sheriff had gone inside the jail for the purpose of bringing the prisoner out; and there was a buzz of expectancy amongst the people as they awaited the prisoner's coming out.

Robin was perplexed to know how the matter could have gone so far without his hearing of it, and was almost afraid that single-handed he would have to undertake both the rescue of the prisoner and the slaying of the sheriff.

Little John and his men, however, had been quicker about their work than Robin anticipated, and within a few minutes of Robin's arrival at the jail, he recognised several of his men in the crowd.

Presently the door of the jail opened, and out came the sheriff, followed closely by the hangman, who led by a halter the poor wretch condemned to die. The poor man shook his head from side to side as he caught sight of the gallows, and walked with a feeble step after the hangman.

As soon as the jail door was closed, Robin motioned

Little John to stand beside it, so as to cut off retreat in that quarter. Then Robin drew his sword, and, as the condemned man walked, Robin severed his bonds at a blow, and the next moment gave the hangman a savage thrust with the point of his sword, which, though it did not wound him very severely, made him scamper off into the crowd, where he was hustled and jostled, and altogether very roughly handled.

The sheriff appeared to be considerably alarmed at the sudden and unexpected attack. The poor prisoner was not a member of his band, as Robin had been led to believe him, but a stranger to the town. As he had no connexion with Robin, the sheriff had not provided himself with the usual number of men, and he was therefore taken aback at the interference with the ordinary course of Nottingham law in the case of a poor thief.

Drawing his sword, the sheriff cleared a circle in the crowd, and then looked with some agitation for an opponent. He was not long without one, for Robin came up to him with his sword drawn.

"What does this mean?" asked the sheriff; "why dost thou interfere with the course of justice in this way? The man is none of thine."

"It's not the prisoner I want," replied Robin, "but thee; though if I save his life while I take thine I shall not regret my visit this day. Fifteen years ago," continued Robin, "thou basely shot my father, while he walked alone and unarmed in the forest. I have kept thy arrow from that day to this, and now,

villain, thou must pay the forfeit of that foul crime with thy blood ; so prepare."

With that Robin attacked the sheriff with such vigour as to leave him no opportunity of replying to the accusation. After fighting for a short time, Robin gave the sheriff a blow on his sword arm which caused him to drop his weapon. Instantly the sheriff fell on his knees, and cried piteously for mercy.

"No, no," was Robin's reply ; "I can shew no mercy ; thou hast plagued me long enough, and I should have slain thee long ago had I known that thou wast the murderer of my father."

Calling Little John to him, Robin bade him bind the sheriff's hands behind his back, which was speedily accomplished. Then they dragged him to the gallows, which he had erected for the poor thief, who stood trembling beside one of Robin's men, so frightened as to be incapable of striking a blow in his own defence.

The sheriff screamed for mercy, and struggled with his captors, but it was all of no avail, and in a few minutes he was hoisted on to the shoulders of Little John, the noose which hung from the gallows placed round his neck, and Little John, suddenly casting him off his shoulders, the sheriff swung struggling in the air. As the body swayed to and fro, Robin fitted the spliced arrow to his bow string, and sent the arrow swiftly to the sheriff's heart. So ends the story of Gammer's life.

There was a fine uproar in the town when the

sheriff's fate became known, but there were few who lamented his loss. Prince John, who happened to arrive in Nottingham a few days after this event, gave orders that in future no Saxon should be elected sheriff of the town. He also inflicted a very heavy fine upon the Saxon inhabitants, which the newly-appointed Norman sheriff—Inluck—collected in such a way as to add still more to the numerous hardships suffered by the poor Saxon residents of Nottingham.





CHAPTER XXIII.

Robin quarrels with Little John, and attends Mass in Nottingham—
The Black Monk betrays Robin—The fight in the Church, and
Robin's capture—Little John and Will slay the Black Monk—
The trick they played upon the Sheriff, his men, and the jailer—
Robin's release.

FOR several months after the death of the sheriff, Robin kept very quiet in the forest. So quiet was he, that at length he became restless for adventures; and this preying upon his mind, brought about a succession of strange dreams. Robin always paid great attention to his dreams, having, like most of the Saxons, a superstitious regard for their meaning. So one morning he called Little John to him, and declared his belief that the Virgin Mary was angry with him because he had not attended mass for a long time; and he had made up his mind to go that very day to a church in Nottingham to the celebration of mass.

"It would be well," said Little John; "but thou must take twelve of thy best men with thee in dis-

guise, lest any of thy enemies in Nottingham molest thee."

"I fear no one," responded Robin, in such an angry tone as Little John had never heard before.

"Do as thou likest about taking the men," said Little John; "but at any rate I and Will must go with thee."

"I will have none of thee," replied Robin; "I can take care of myself."

"Thou shalt not choose; I and Will, without thy permission, will be there to serve thee."

At this Robin gave Little John a blow with his hand. Such a thing had never taken place between them since their first encounter.

Instantly Little John clapped his hand to his sword and said,—

"If thou hadst not been my master, thou wouldst have paid dear for that blow; but since thou treatest me so badly, thou shalt get another in my place, for I'll serve thee no more."

Robin made no reply. He had not spoken of his intention to any one save Little John, and now, without further delay, he set off, content with a very simple disguise for the town.

As soon as he had gone Little John sought Will, and told him what had occurred, repeating his determination not to serve Robin any longer. But Will persuaded him to remain with them until evening, hoping that, in the meantime, Robin would return and make his peace with Little John.

Meanwhile Robin proceeded on his way towards

Nottingham, passed unobserved through the streets, and entered the Church of St Mary's, where mass was being celebrated.

He knelt in front of the altar, and was very quickly absorbed in meditation and prayer. Now, there was not far from Robin one of the two monks whom he had forced to kneel and pray with him in the forest. Quietly observing Robin for some time, he recognised his face, and then left the church immediately. First of all, without confiding his secret to any one, he repaired to all the gates and ordered them, in the sheriff's name, to be closed. Then the monk proceeded to the residence of the new sheriff, Inluck, and bade him get ready his armed men, because the king's great enemy was in the town, and was at that moment in St Mary's Church.

Inluck was overjoyed at the intelligence. He summoned about a score of men, armed them, and then directed them to proceed along some by-streets and meet him at the gate of the church.

After this Blackbeard, the monk, returned to the church, and there, to his joy, he found Robin still kneeling in the same place, and apparently absorbed in prayer.

Shortly afterwards the sheriff arrived, and was quickly joined by his men. As they walked up the church, they made such a clatter as to arouse Robin, who, turning his head, saw to his alarm a body of men with drawn swords in their hands advancing towards him. Some of them had already placed themselves between Robin and the altar.

Then he thought in his heart of what Little John had wanted him to do that morning, and he was sorely distressed. No time, however, was to be lost. The men were rapidly approaching him, service had been suspended, and all in the church had risen to their feet in surprise and wonder.

Robin was not long in determining what to do. He drew his sword, placed his back against one of the pillars, and called for the first who should dare to attack him.

Although the sheriff had led the men to the church, he did not seem at all disposed for an encounter of this kind. He called upon his men to surround Robin and beat his sword down. No more than three men, however, could get near Robin, owing to the contiguity of a pillar, and the wall of the church.

Forced on by those behind, three men, willingly or unwillingly, found themselves standing face to face with Robin.

Without waiting for them to commence, Robin struck at them with vigour. The men were terribly alarmed; one ducked his head, and another dived head-foremost past him. As they became jammed in front of him, Robin was able to do terrible execution amongst them. They stood like a timid flock of sheep before him, their weapons drawn, but with no heart to wield them.

Robin made good use of his opportunity. He cut great gashes in their heads, and gave them such cuts on their arms as to make quite a heap of disabled men on the floor. Some fell with mortal wounds;

others, more prudent than hurt, dropped to escape a blow, woefully afraid. Wherever they stood thickest, thither into their midst Robin pressed, and none dared to stand before him. He called aloud for the sheriff, and dared him to fight; but he answered not. He was safely ensconced in a little gallery, the entrance to which he had fastened; and from thence he gave orders, or shouted out remonstrances during the progress of the fight.

As ill luck would have it, Robin stumbled over the body of one who lay on the floor, and in falling his sword flew out of his hand. The men who were still on their legs sprang upon him in an instant, and held him fast upon the ground.

Then Inluck, seeing that Robin was safely caught, descended from the gallery, and assisted his men to bind the prisoner's arms.

"Ah, ah, ah!" laughed the sheriff; "so my fine bird, thou wilt hang the sheriffs of Nottingham, wilt thou, and kill their men, and rob fat bishops, and slay the king's deer? But prithee make haste and repent, for thy days are numbered."

Robin spoke not in reply, for he remembered the hasty words he had used in the morning to the best of all his forest friends.

After binding him, they dragged him to his feet; the church doors were ordered to be unlocked by Blackbeard, who had remained on guard over them, and the sheriff and his men marched along the streets with their prisoner, and lodged him in the common jail.

The capture having been effected, many of those who had fallen on the floor of the church rose to their feet, and began hobbling about the church, or sat on seats to have their wounds dressed. It was found that four of their number had been slain, and that of the remainder eight were severely wounded.

The news spread rapidly in the town that Robin Hood had been taken prisoner in the church.

The sheriff, to make doubly sure of his captive, ordered the jailer to put him into the strongest cell he had, and double-lock all the doors in the place. The jailer received his prisoner with grim humour, and gave him to understand by sundry noddings and jerkings of his head that he had nothing to expect but hanging, and that in a very short space of time.

Down several flights of steps he led Robin, until they came to a cell which was about eighteen feet below the surface of the ground, and into which no ray of light ever penetrated. Into this place he thrust Robin, telling him as he bolted the door that he had better accustom his eyes to the darkness as soon as he could, because he would have enough of it ere long.

Very soon after the departure of Robin from the forest, it occurred to Little John that Robin had, for some purpose which he had not disclosed, acted in the strange way which he had done ; and a singular apprehension took possession of him that Robin would get into difficulties. He communicated his fears to Will, and they both determined to follow on his track with as much speed as possible. They put on the

disguise of monks, and wore swords beneath their gowns.

When at length they did arrive at Nottingham, although it was only mid-day, to their astonishment they found the gate through which they were wont to pass closed. They were amazed at what they saw. Going up to the gate they shouted to the gate-keeper to open for them, but the man only laughed. There were a number of armed men about the walls, and by the noise in the streets they were convinced that something very unusual had happened.

Little John called out to know, from the men on the town-wall, the reason of the gate being shut.

The men stated that they could not tell what had happened, but that some one whom the king loved was in the town, and was about to be entertained by the sheriff.

Upon this, all the men laughed.

Little John and Will repaired to the next gate, and all the others in succession, but found them all shut; and received evasive answers from all to whom they spoke, as to what was the matter in the town.

While they waited about near one of the gates, it was suddenly opened, and Blackbeard, the monk, rode out. Seeing two of his brethren, as he supposed, he rode towards where they were lying on the grass, and asked them whither they were bound.

"We are going into the town," Little John replied; "but the churls will not open the gates to us."

"That is little wonder," replied Blackbeard, "for there hath been such an affray in Nottingham this

day as will make the king's heart glad, and many an abbot too, methinks."

"Thou talkest riddles," Will rejoined.

"Well, walk beside me for a short distance, and I will tell thee all about it," the monk said.

Blackbeard turned his horse's head towards the forest, and Little John and Will accompanied him.

"Thou must have heard of Robin Hood," said Blackbeard.

"He is an outlaw, who hath robbed many a good bishop," replied Little John, "and no monk wishes well to him."

"True," responded Blackbeard; "and at this very hour he lies in Nottingham jail, and he comes not out, I trow, until he is to be hung. He robbed me and my fellow once of a large sum of money, but the king's reward will beat that affair. Methinks I shall get nothing short of an abbey for my pains. Thou must know it was I that had him taken prisoner. I was in St Mary's Church at mass, and who should walk in, and kneel close to the altar, but Robin Hood, as bold as any true worshipper. He knelt him down upon the ground, and I stole out first to the gates, and ordered the men, in the name of the sheriff, to close them, and then to the sheriff's house, and bade him raise a number of men and go instantly to the church and take the notorious robber. When the sheriff got to the church, I fastened the doors, and guarded them until the fight was over. And what a fight it was! Four of the sheriff's men were laid dead upon the ground,—God rest their souls!—and

near a dozen wounded men were left to hobble for the rest of their lives. At last they bound him, and now he is lodged in the jail. I am off at once to our abbey to get permission to ride to London to acquaint the king. In two days I am to be at the sheriff's house again, who will have letters ready for me to take to the king, acquainting him with the service I have done, and to ask his will concerning Robin."

All the time the monk was talking, Little John and Will walked silently beside him, now and then ejaculating some short word of approval or satisfaction at the intelligence which the monk was communicating. They had got some distance from the town before he had finished his story.

"Thou goest in two days to see the sheriff again, methinks thou saidst?" Little John observed.

"Ay!" responded Blackbeard.

"Thou wilt never see the sheriff more," Little John replied, in a tone of voice so stern and strange, that Blackbeard turned his head hastily to look at him.

In a moment Little John seized him by the cowl and pulled him off the horse. Directing Will to lead the horse into the forest, Little John dragged Blackbeard off the roadway amongst the trees, very much to the man's astonishment. When they had got some distance from the roadway, Little John flung the monk upon the ground and drew his sword.

"What dost thou mean?" exclaimed Blackbeard, in some alarm.

"This much," was the reply, "that Robin Hood, whom thou hast betrayed, is our master; he is no

robber, but a restorer of poor men's rights. He has only taken from you monks, that of which you despoiled the poor; and thou has betrayed the noblest man that ever lived. Therefore, for thy pains, take that;" so saying, Little John smote off the monk's head in an instant.

The two men made a hole, in which they buried his body, and so left him in the forest.

Their next thought was how they might rescue Robin. They had heard enough from the monk to assure them that no present danger was to be apprehended from Robin's capture. So they mounted the monk's horse, and turned his head in the direction of the Greenwood Glade. Their hearts were more sorrowful than they had ever felt before. They rode slowly and silently through the forest for some time.

At length Will said they must keep from Marian the news they had learned. Then it was agreed that, when two days had elapsed, one should keep the monk's appointment with the sheriff; and, meanwhile, they were to hold a consultation with the other leaders of Robin's band, as to what course they were to pursue.

There were sundry inquiries made after Robin by several of the band, as they sauntered in at the close of the day, which were answered evasively by Little John or Will.

Marian, however, was very uneasy when the evening meal was ended, and Robin did not make his appearance.

Will tried to persuade her that he was only on a

harmless expedition in one of the neighbouring villages, and would be with them on the morrow.

In the course of the night, Little John and Will took a number of the leaders aside, and told them quietly what had occurred. There was great consternation amongst the men on hearing the news; but all were firmly resolved that he should never die on the gallows, or at the hands of the Sheriff of Nottingham.

Various plans were discussed for effecting his release; and at length one, which promised most success, was agreed upon. In the morning the majority of the men, receiving mysterious hints from Little John and Will, strolled off into the forest, with as little apparent concern as possible. When they were all assembled at some distance from the glade, all the others received the information which had, as yet, only been communicated to the leaders.

The latter had the greatest difficulty in restraining the men; and proposals of the most rash character were made for the purpose of effecting Robin's immediate release. The plan which had been agreed upon by the leaders, they wisely kept to themselves.

The men were divided into two bands, one portion was to assemble in the neighbourhood of the sheriff's house by noon on the following day, and the other half was to be secreted in the neighbourhood of the jail. All were to assume disguises of as varied a character as possible. It was further arranged that they were to enter the town in twos and threes, so as to escape notice.

Little John and Will left the others in the forest,

and immediately proceeded to Nottingham to complete their arrangements. They were both dressed in the same guise as Blackbeard.

On the evening of the second day, they both repaired to the sheriff's house. One knocked boldly at the gate, and both were admitted with signs of evident delight by the porter.

The sheriff was in high glee when Will presented himself, personating, as he did, the dead monk. He told the sheriff that the required permission had been granted by his superior, who had further ordered his companion to accompany him on the journey.

Inluck talked over the deeds of the preceding day, in evident good humour at the share he had had in the transaction, and Will and Little John both laughed heartily at the manner in which the sheriff had managed to keep out of the affray.

The sheriff complimented the monk upon his adroitness in the matter, and besought the monk, while he was in London, to speak a word to the king in his (the sheriff's) favour.

Will promised faithfully that when he got to London he would recommend the sheriff as deserving of the king's notice.

The sheriff's heart bounded at the prospect of his future advancement, and the best wine in his cellar was ordered up.

Will drank to Inluck's health, and to the king's health; and then the healths of every one of note in the town, and last of all, amid much laughter, to the health of Robin Hood. These health-drinkings had

the desired effect upon the sheriff; and before the last toast was proposed, he was very drunk.

Then Will produced a small parchment roll, which he pretended was an account of the fight and capture of Robin, and in which the sheriff's name and share in the transactions were duly set forth. To this document Will wanted the sheriff's seal, which he attached without hesitation.

This accomplished, they remained drinking together until all the rest in the house were gone to their beds; and then Little John and Will quietly carried the sheriff down-stairs to the cellar. He was so drunk as to be perfectly unconscious of what was going on, and was as quiet as could be desired.

In the cellar they found a quantity of cordage; and with some of it they bound the sheriff tightly to some staples in the wall, in an upright position. To prevent an alarm being given by him, they put a gag into his mouth.

After making him perfectly secure, they fastened up the cellar door and barricaded it in such a way as to prevent any one from entering it without considerable difficulty.

The only other persons in the house were two men-servants, and those Little John and Will next proceeded to visit.

They found them sleeping very heavily, having been availing themselves of the opportunity presented by the arrival of the monks, to drink very freely.

These men, after some, but useless, resistance, were bound back to back, in such a way as made it impos-

sible for them to release themselves, and dragged to a distant lumber-room. They were also gagged, to prevent them giving an alarm.

The two pretended monks then returned to the dining-room, and waited for the dawn of day. Never had night seemed so long and wearisome as that did to Robin's faithful friends. At length day came, and then the pretended monks left the house, taking care to fasten every door behind them as they went out, and made the best of their way to the jail. On seeing them emerge, those of Robin's band, who were in the neighbourhood, followed them down the streets.

On arriving at the jail, Will knocked loudly, and after some time had elapsed, a little opening was thrust back in the door, and the face of the jailer was seen.

He scanned the faces and forms of the two monks with a curious half-suspicious look, and inquired their business.

"We have come from the sheriff," said Will, "and are going up to London to see the king, and acquaint him with what has happened. See, here is the sheriff's seal."

Will opened the parchment roll and handed it to the jailer, who knew the sheriff's seal well.

"But before we go," continued Will, "he would have us see the prisoner, and mark whether he is indeed safely locked up; for if he escapes, the king would most surely hang the jailer."

"Ay, and the sheriff too," the jailer muttered; "but there's no fear of that, my masters."

At the same time he unlocked the door, and admitted the monks. The door was locked and bolted behind them, then from a recess in the wall he took down a great bunch of keys, and preceded his visitors along some passages, and down the flight of steps which led to the cell in which Robin was confined.

Inserting the key in the rusty lock, he managed, after some delay, to shoot back the lock, and then he called to Robin to come out, as the sheriff had sent two monks to speak with him.

Robin did not stir.

Then Little John called him by name, and bade him not keep them waiting.

Robin recognised the voice, and came out instantly, but failed to recognise his friends, because the light confused him.

The jailer stood holding the door in his hand, and looking on; when, to his astonishment, the two monks grasped Robin by the hand. The next moment the jailer received such a poke in his ribs as sent him reeling into the cell which Robin had just left. Before he could rise to his feet, the door was locked and bolted. With the keys in his hands, Little John immediately led the way up-stairs again.

Will threw the gown of a monk over Robin. Little John then unbolted and unlocked the gate, and the three passed out.

There were several of Robin's men outside, who recognised him the moment he came out.

Little John locked the gate of the jail, and then threw the keys over the wall.

After this the three walked quietly down the streets and out of the town, followed by a number of their men in twos and threes.

On arriving in the forest, Robin and Little John hastened off to the Greenwood Glade, while Will remained to bring up the men.

As they journeyed through the forest, Robin said, "Little John, thou hast done me a good for an evil turn; but thou must forgive me; it was not in my heart that I sought to vex thee. Henceforth thou shalt be the leader of my band, and I will serve thee."

Little John was deeply moved at Robin's words, but vowed he would never be other than plain Little John, and that he would follow Robin's fortunes to the day of his death.

So Little John and Robin were reconciled, and the latter promised that he would never go unattended into Nottingham again.

Marian was horrified when she found that Robin had really been in the power of the sheriff, but was contented when he repeated the promise he had given Little John.

In the course of the day all the members of Robin's band reached the forest, and in the evening there was a right merry feast in the glade, where the guests were entertained to celebrate Robin's return.

The Sheriff of Nottingham and his men remained in their uncomfortable positions all night, and when the morning light stole into the cellar, and the sheriff

began to look about him and put things together in his head, he could not comprehend how he came to be there, and fixed in such an uncomfortable manner. At first he thought he must have been drinking heavily, and that his discomfords were the result of a heavy night's debauch. Then he tried to yawn, and found that his mouth would not shut. At length he discovered that his jaws were fastened open in a most remarkable way. He likewise discovered that his arms and feet were bound. He pondered all the events of the preceding day over in his mind, and at length, as hour after hour flitted by, and he became more and more sober, the truth that some trick had been played upon him by the monks took full possession of his mind. He struggled hard, but could not succeed in releasing himself. Afterwards he tried to call for help, but found that the most faint and inarticulate sounds only proceeded from his throat. So hour after hour passed,—no one came to release him, and all he could do was to kick with his heels against some boards that lay at his feet.

The men in the lumber-room were just as much perplexed in the course of the night as to what had happened to them. They arrived, after some considerable time, at the most natural conclusion respecting it, which was, that they had been locked up in some cell for being drunk. They were sorely puzzled, however, to know by whose authority they had been so treated. Being in the dark, they could not tell when day dawned, and so they lay in the easiest possible position which they could get into

and waited with as much patience as they were masters of for their deliverance.

Towards mid-day the sheriff was wanted on important business, and so there were sundry knocks at his gate, which met with no response. Inquiries were made in the neighbourhood for the sheriff, and late in the afternoon the neighbours resolved to force their way into the house, and see what had become of him.

The house was accordingly entered, and the rooms searched, when at length the sheriff was discovered in the cellar, bound in the way described.

The first question the sheriff asked on being released was whether Robin Hood was safe; but no one could tell, and he immediately set off to the jail, to ascertain for himself. He would make no explanations to those who had found him, as to the cause of his singular imprisonment.

Several persons accompanied the sheriff to the jail, but they could get no admission.

At length measures were obtained to force an entrance, and then the jailer could not be found anywhere, and several hours elapsed before he was discovered. His story only confirmed the sheriff in his suspicions that he had been the victim of a deeply-laid plan, which had been well carried out by the monks.

On his return home he searched for his men, but without success. During the night, however, he was alarmed beyond measure by hearing an indistinct knocking in the house, and he left the house precipitately, believing it was haunted.

The next morning a further search was instituted, and at last the two men were found in the lumber-room, in an exceedingly hungry and thirsty condition. They were released, and their story was so confused as only to perplex their master still more.

The sheriff was very much afraid of the king getting to hear of Robin's capture and escape, and lived for several months in continual dread of being either heavily fined or hung for his negligence.





CHAPTER XXIV.

Will's Visit to Nottingham—His Betrayal by Senior Sneak—Three heads, the Messenger, is unwittingly the Betrayer of a Secret—Capture and Death of the Traitor—How Will was to have been hung, but Inluck got a Roll in a Ditch instead.

THE trick played upon Sheriff Inluck by Robin's men, and the adroit manner in which that noted outlaw made his escape, induced the sheriff to offer a large reward to any one in Nottingham who could give such information as should lead not only to the capture of Robin, but to that of any of his men. This excited the cupidity of one of the band who resided in Nottingham, and he went to the sheriff and arranged with him for the betrayal of the very first rover that visited the town. The sheriff promised that he would not only give the man the reward which he had offered, but would also advance him to a position of trust in the town.

The effect of Robin's escape was to make the band act a little more cautiously.

A year and a half elapsed without any such dangerous risk being run. Two years passed by, and the members of the band visited Nottingham with as little regard for their personal safety as formerly.

Upon one occasion Will went into the town to obtain some trifling articles that were wanted, and met with the traitor who had agreed to acquaint the sheriff when any member of the band visited the town. They conversed for a short time, and Will told the man what he had come to obtain.

Immediately on their parting, this fellow reported to the sheriff what had occurred, and a strong force was dispatched to capture him.

The men surrounded the shop in which Will was standing, then the sheriff boldly entered it, clapped Will on his shoulder, and demanded his instant surrender.

Will replied by giving Inluck a blow that knocked him over the counter.

The shop in which they were standing was that of a man who was a general dealer in all sorts of commodities. There was seasoned wood to be obtained for bows, or the finished article; quivers and arrows, manufactured by the very best makers in the town. There was every variety of cloth known at that period. Leather and hides for coats, belts for the waist, and swords of every size. Besides these, he dealt in necessaries for the table; and he sold meal and flour in large and small quantities.

It happened that behind the counter, at the point where Will was standing, was an open barrel about

half full of meal. Into this Will pitched Inluck. He was a heavy man, and went right down into the meal, and there stuck until some of his men upset the barrel and released him ; but then he came out covered from head to foot with meal in such a way as to make him look more like a miller than the dignified Sheriff of Nottingham.

Unfortunately for Will, he had no sword with him, so he fought with whatever he could lay hands upon.

Barrels of several sorts were knocked over in the affray, and men tumbled head over heels into all sorts of queer corners, out of which the goods were pitched, to the dismay of the shopkeeper. The noise brought the man's wife into the shop, and the cellarman came up from below to see what was the matter, and he forgot to shut the trap-door after him. The row also caused a crowd to gather in the street, and those that had the chance helped themselves to some of the scattered articles.

As soon as Inluck got his eyes clear from the meal, he mounted the counter, where he was out of Will's way, and shouted out many impossible orders to his men.

The affray, however, came to an unlucky termination for Will, for as he was retiring before the superior number of his assailants, he tumbled headlong into the cellar, and lay there half dead with his fall.

The sheriff's men descended, and he was soon bound with cords. After this a difficulty arose in the way of his exit, for the shopkeeper, finding his shop turned upside down, and to a great extent inside out,

blockaded the doorway with his portly person, and demanded restitution before the prisoner was carried off.

Inluck tried to persuade the shopkeeper that all would be made right, and vowed that Will should be hung within three days.

The shopkeeper urged that hanging was a poor compensation to him ; and, for his part, he would prefer that Will's life should be spared, provided he promised to pay the damage that had been done.

Ultimately the sheriff pledged his word to pay for all the damage that had been done, and then he was allowed to depart. At the same time the sheriff made up his mind that the money should be raised by a tax upon the Saxons.

Will was first of all conveyed to the sheriff's house, where he was confronted with the two men in the sheriff's employ, who had been bound one night by the two monks. The men, however, could not identify him, and the sheriff said it was not of the slightest consequence, as they could not do more or less than hang him.

The night of the capture the scout was at the sheriff's house for the promised reward. Inluck paid him half the stipulated sum, and the remainder was to be paid on the execution of Will. This scout's name was Senior Sneak, and he had a brother named Junior Sneak, also of Robin's band, who resided in Mansfield. Senior pleaded for his brother's advancement, as well as his own, and the sheriff told him to get him to come to Nottingham without delay.

The difficulty was, how to send a message to Mansfield; and at length the sheriff got a learned monk to write a message to Junior Sneak, acquainting him with the capture of Will, and bidding him at once repair to Nottingham. The written scrap was committed to the care of a noted beggar in Nottingham, who had a fixed round of towns through which he passed in pursuit of his calling, and who sometimes carried messages of a secret nature between friends. The man was known by the name of Old Threeheads, from a habit he had of wearing three hats upon his head one above the other. The two top hats he made use of to carry any such scraps of writing in, as the one with which he was now entrusted. When he started upon his journey, his hats were fastened to his head by a thick leather strap. He also carried a thick pikestaff in his hand. It was a noted stick, and many a roguish lad in Nottingham knew what the weight of it was. Over his shoulders he wore a cloak, which was so well padded that, in the thinnest part of it, there were more than six thicknesses of cloth. Such a cloak kept out the heaviest storm of rain. Three bags were suspended from his neck by means of leather straps. One of these bags he carried about half full of meal, and the others were to hold any donations in money or food that he received. There were, besides, many snug pockets in the folds of his thick cloak, in which he stored his money. The produce of years of begging were fastened in his cloak.

To this man the letter was confided, with instruc-

tions to carry it to Junior Sneak with as little delay as possible.

After many explanations, Threeheads seemed to have got a glimmering of what was expected from him; and, on setting out, received half the customary fee, the other half remaining to be paid on his return.

On his way out of the town, Threeheads called at several abbeys from whence he sometimes got commissions, and on this occasion was fortunate enough to have two more engagements. Although the man was remarkably faithful in all his transactions, and never betrayed the trust reposed in him, yet he had an unfortunate failing with regard to the verbal part of the instructions that were given him.

This occasion was no exception to the rule; and, as he passed out of the town and along the roads, his old habit of mixing up the instructions commenced, and, as he repeated over and over again his verbal instructions, he began to grow muddled therewith. First of all, he ran them into one another, then he divided them in the wrong way; next, he mixed them up promiscuously; and, finally, put them together according to his fancy, sharing the whole of the messages in equal portions. As the messages had previously been mixed all together, the result was, that he apportioned to each message a part of some other.

Upon this occasion the three messages were of the most contradictory nature. He had been instructed to tell Junior Sneak that he was to come immediately to Nottingham.

The second message was from one erring monk to another, and was to the effect that all had been found out, and that Brother No. 1 was going to run away.

Message the third was directing the immediate withdrawal of one brother from his abbey for prudential reasons, which were understood only between the brethren.

It was always the rule for Threeheads to carry the messages with which he was entrusted in this double form in his head, and in his hats, in case of any accident befalling the written messages.

The poor man's memory was destined to be still further perplexed by an event that came upon him most unexpectedly, as he walked through the forest. This was a meeting with Robin Hood.

Robin was taking a stroll for his own pleasure, and to see what he could pick up, when he met Threeheads, the beggar. As he approached, Robin eyed him with some curiosity, and was at first puzzled to make out what he had on his head. When Threeheads, however, came up to where Robin was, the latter saw that the uncommon height of the stranger was produced by the peculiar head-gear that he wore.

"Good day," quoth Robin; but Threeheads made no reply.

"Tarry, tarry!" cried Robin; but still the man went on.

He was busily engaged in going over his messages, like a monk telling his beads; and was, at the particu-

lar moment when Robin spoke, in a little difficulty with them.

Seeing that the man made no reply, Robin rose very leisurely, and, going in advance of Threeheads, bade him stand still, while he took a good look at him.

But the beggar was very wroth, and raised his staff to give Robin a blow, whereupon the latter, with a dexterous thrust, cast Threeheads' staff out of his hand.

"What dost thou mean?" quoth the beggar. "Thou art a wild fellow to treat a poor beggar like this!"

"I came to meet thee," was Robin's reply, "and it is not mannerly to refuse to speak when one gives a salutation."

"Thou art a forest rover, methinks some one belonging to Robin Hood's band; but thou wilt all be served as the one now lying in Nottingham Jail will be the day after to-morrow." At the same time he gave significant expression to his words.

"Thou art a riddler," Robin replied; "there is no one belonging to Robin Hood's band at this present time in any jail."

"But I say there is," the beggar said, with an air of positive knowledge; "and I have a letter from the man who captured him, Senior Sneak, to his brother at Mansfield, telling him it's all found out."

"I must see that letter," said Robin.

"That thou shalt not," quoth Threeheads.

Robin repeated his demand thrice, but Three-

heads stood firm. With a blow from his staff, Robin deftly cast the beggar's hats from his head; when, seeing that Robin was determined, Threeheads fell on his knees and begged for mercy.

"Give me the letter," was all that Robin said.

"It's in the middle hat," quoth the beggar.

Robin tore the hats asunder, and discovered three letters.

"Now," said he to Threeheads, "come with me into the forest."

The beggar rose from his knees, and, picking up his hats, proceeded in the direction which Robin indicated, and was not allowed to stop until he came upon the members of Robin's band in the second glade.

There they found Friar Tuck and Alan, both of whom were slightly skilled in reading. The three letters were immediately handed to them, and, after some little trouble, they were deciphered.

The whole band was called together, and the contents of Sneak's letter read aloud. When it was thus discovered that Will was in jail there was the utmost excitement amongst the men; and they were unanimous in their determination that the sheriff's sentence on Will should not be carried into effect.

A council was held, to take into consideration the betrayal of trust that had taken place, and at length it was determined that Senior Sneak should be brought into the forest by some means. Threeheads was to be the medium of communication, and readily consented, for a sum of gold, to return to Nottingham, and deliver a letter to the betrayer of

Will. The beggar was solemnly sworn to secrecy, and vowed he would do Robin's behest.

A letter was accordingly written, purporting to be from Junior Sneak, asking Senior to meet him in the forest, on the next day after the letter was delivered, so as to take him into the town.

Threeheads was immediately dispatched with the letter back to Nottingham. The other two messages and letters he committed to the care of one of Robin's men, who was specially commissioned to deliver them.

The same evening Threeheads returned to town, and delivered his letter to Senior Sneak, having on the road concocted a very fair story about his journey.

Senior Sneak made himself master of the contents of his epistle, and in the afternoon of the following day strolled out very unsuspectingly to meet his brother. He was very busy castle-building with the reward of his roguery, and had strolled out several miles, when suddenly he was startled by the apparition of Robin in the roadway. If his master had dropped from the sky, he could not have surprised Senior more. Instantly the truth flashed through his mind,—his treachery had been discovered, and the wretched man trembled in every limb.

Robin stood still in the roadway, nor spoke one word; and the unhappy man, unable to conceal his emotion, fell down upon his knees, and in the most piteous terms begged for mercy.

"What hast thou done?" inquired Robin, "why art thou alarmed?"

But the man answered nothing, only, with tears streaming down his face, he continued to beg piteously for mercy.

Again and again Robin asked him what was the matter; but there was something in his voice and manner that told the unhappy culprit all had been discovered. After the parley had lasted some time, Robin gave a low whistle, and immediately Little John, Scathelock, and several others came out of the forest. The wretched man was immediately bound, and led away into the forest, in the direction of the second glade. As they walked along, Robin blew three loud blasts upon his horn.

Sneak did not cease shedding tears all the while; he felt that his fate was sealed. On reaching the glade he was bound to a tree and left.

In the course of a few hours all the members of Robin's band, from the several villages round about Sherwood, began to arrive at the glade, and as they entered they inquired eagerly on what expedition they were going to be engaged.

This was the evening preceding the execution of Will. When all the men had arrived a circle was formed, having near its centre the tree to which Sneak was bound. It was not at first known who this man was, because his head was covered.

When the ring had been formed, Robin stepped into the centre, and asked, in a tone of voice that sounded unfamiliar to all present, what was the reward due to treachery.

All present answered with one voice, "Death!"

Immediately Robin tore the covering from the head of Senior Sneak, and a shout of anger rose from the band as Robin exclaimed, "See the traitor!"

Junior Sneak was present, and seemed horrified at the discovery.

Standing by Senior's side, Robin told the band how he had betrayed Will into the hands of the sheriff of Nottingham, and how he had had a letter written to his brother in Mansfield, inviting him to come to Nottingham to share with him the reward of his treachery.

The letter was produced, and read by Friar Tuck and Alan to the assembled band.

Junior Sneak was overcome with grief at hearing what his brother had done; and, sitting down upon the grass, wept bitterly.

A second time Robin demanded, what was the punishment due for the offence, and again the same word was repeated—"Death!"

Turning to the culprit, Robin asked him whether he had anything to say,—

He replied, "Nothing, save to ask mercy."

"No mercy can be shown to a betrayer," was Robin's reply.

He was, by Robin's directions, unbound, and marched for some distance into the forest; then, when they found a tree convenient for the purpose, they halted. A rope was hung over one of the boughs and fastened round the man's neck. Six members of the band took hold of the end of the rope, and in an instant the culprit was swinging lifeless in the air.

His body was afterwards buried under the tree, and a cross was cut in the bark to mark the spot. The band then returned to the glade.

The next morning was the time fixed for the execution of Will. He had been locked up by the jailer in the same cell which had been occupied by Robin Hood, and the jailer had been exceedingly vigilant to guard against surprise.

Will spent the time between his capture and the morning fixed for his execution in a very unhappy frame of mind. He had racked his brains in vain to account for his capture, and wondered whether Robin would hear of it in time to prevent his execution from being carried into effect.

The gallows was erected in front of the jail, the sheriff himself superintending all the details of construction.

Very early that morning Robin and many of his men were in the town prying about, and before the hour arrived there were nearly a hundred of Will's true friends about the jail, and near the gate through which they hoped to escape.

When the finishing strokes were being put to the gallows, Robin, standing by the sheriff's side, heard some expressions of joy at what was about to be done, fall from the sheriff's lips.

After examining everything, Inluck knocked at the door of the jail, was admitted, and in a few minutes the door was again thrown open, and Will came out, bound, and guarded on every side.

He scanned the crowd eagerly, but the throng was

so great that he did not recognise his friends. Turning to the sheriff, he craved a boon before he died. It was, that one arm should be freed and a sword given him, and a dozen men set before him.

The sheriff declined the offer, declared that nothing should save him from a dog's death, and said he would treat in like manner every member of Robin's band.

Then Will begged that his arms might be unbound, and that he might be allowed with his fists to do battle against the sheriff's men armed with swords.

Still the sheriff persisted in refusing.

While Inluck was speaking, he had got with his prisoner into a part of the street where the crowd was thickest.

Suddenly, a tall man elbowed his way through the men who were guarding Will, and with a quick stroke severed his bonds.

This was Little John.

Finding his arms freed, Will understood what was intended, and snatching a sword out of the hands of one of the sheriff's men, waved it in the air with a loud shout, and then brought it down upon the head of his nearest guard, felling him to the ground.

"Place thy back to mine," cried Little John, and immediately they stood back to back; and, with their swords, they quickly made a clear space round them.

The crowd fell back instinctively, but cheered the prisoner loudly. The sheriff's men made a show of fighting when they saw but two men in their midst; but they soon found themselves surrounded by more

than eighty of Robin's band, and the fighting became rather too serious for them.

Robin had followed closely at the heels of the sheriff, and as soon as Little John had struck the first blow, he seized the sheriff from behind by the nape of his neck, and gave him such a grip as made him fancy some strange mistake had been made by his own men.

"Hallo!" he cried, "what's this, what's this; I'm the sheriff!"

"I know that," was Robin's response; "and it's the sheriff I'm going to hang."

The sheriff, however, was not at all willing that this should be done, and called loudly for assistance, though none came; because all his men were too busily engaged defending themselves. He looked on the crowd of people round him, and again cried for help, but they only mocked him.

Robin shook his prisoner as a cat shakes a mouse, and wrung him by the neck as if he would have twisted off his head. At length Robin spied where a very dirty ditch ran in the roadway; knocking the sheriff's legs from under him, he flung him in, and while he lay floundering about, to the intense delight of the people, Robin hastened away to assist the main body of his men.

Will and Little John were standing side by side then, and many of the sheriff's men were lying about the ground. They stood no chance against the vigorous onslaught that had been made upon them, and at length beat a hasty retreat, leaving Robin and his men masters of the field.

Seeing no further opposition, Robin gave orders to fly to the gate, and in half an hour the whole band was resting beneath the shade of an old oak in the forest.

"I never expected to have seen you again," said Will. "It was the strangest thing that ever happened to our band, none of the sheriff's men were about when I entered the town."

The story of his betrayal was soon told him, and also the manner in which the offender had been punished.

When the sheriff found himself in the gutter, he rolled over several times, and was then dragged on to his feet by some sympathising Saxon; but he cut such a droll figure, that the crowd roared with laughter. His face appeared to have been completely changed by his fall, and thick mud of a most unsavoury odour dropped from his face and limbs. His clothes, too, were in like manner thickly coated with the filth into which he had fallen; and, as he walked along the streets towards his home, he exclaimed again and again, "The very devils are in league with Robin Hood!"

In the evening he sent for Senior Sneak, almost inclining to the suspicion that a trick had been played upon him by that man, and when he could not be found, he stormed furiously, and vowed that he would never trust a Saxon more.

The gallows were taken down amid the derisive cheers of the people, and the beams carried back to the jail, there to lie until they were again wanted.

The jailer had watched the prisoner out with evi-

dent pride at having been able to keep him so securely, and when the uproar in the streets commenced, he saw, to his dismay, through a hole in the door, that, after all, the sheriff's men were not able to keep their prisoner.

The story of how the sheriff would have hung a Saxon, but got a roll in a ditch instead, was told on many a winter's night afterwards, amid much merry laughter, in the houses of the Saxons of Nottingham.





CHAPTER XXV.

The Bishop of Hereford ventures into Sherwood Forest again—He chases Robin Hood, and captures Widow Hardlock—The old Woman is released, and the Bishop taken prisoner—How the Bishop was treated—Robin is obliged to disperse his Band, and takes Sanctuary.

IN the course of the year 1211 the Bishop of Hereford had occasion to pass through Sherwood Forest on temporal, not spiritual, matters, and travelled with a large escort. Returning through the forest by the same route he had gone, he very unexpectedly came upon Robin Hood, walking alone.

Seeing so large a company with the bishop, Robin thought discretion was the better part of valour, and so he took to his heels as hard as he could.

The bishop, however, had recognised his old enemy, and, seeing him try to escape, called out to his followers to capture him, that he was no other than Robin Hood. In a moment some of the boldest of the bishop's men started off in pursuit, accompanied by the bishop himself.

Robin had made for the heart of the forest, but was not fleet enough to get out of sight before his enemies were in full chase after him. The bishop kept one eye steadily fixed upon Robin's retreating figure, and the other upon his faithful followers.

When the bishop came upon Robin, he had been thinking of other things than meeting with so distinguished a stranger, and was rather nonplussed at the sight of so many persons. Remembering his experience in Nottingham Jail, he was not at all willing to combat against such odds. As he ran, he cast an occasional glance behind him, to see what was going on, and was rather alarmed to find that the bishop and his men were in full cry after him.

Robin bethought him of the widow Hardlock's cottage near his parents' grave, and immediately doubling his speed, he ran thereto. The woman was sitting at her spindle spinning. She recognised Robin as he came almost breathlessly towards her, and guessed that he was in trouble.

"I am pursued," gasped Robin as well as he could, "exchange dresses with me, and before you get far I will rescue you again."

He threw off his green dress, and doffed his cap, and the woman tossed off her gown and cap. The exchange was speedily effected, and then, while Robin sat down to the spindle the woman hid herself in a corner of the room beneath some hides.

The bishop caught a glimpse of Robin as he ran into the cottage, and, with a loud exclamation of joy, declared that his men's fortunes were made, as Robin

would be their prisoner. He directed them to surround the place, so as to prevent the possibility of escape, and, followed by two or three, boldly entered. Looking round the room, he caught sight of a leg protruding from the heap of hides, and, with a loud laugh, he pointed this out to his men. The leg was seized, and Robin, as they thought, was immediately dragged out.

On catching sight of his face, one of the men said, "'Tis the ugliest man I've seen for many a day."

Said the bishop, "Be warned by his example. Sin always mars the countenance, and makes the young man prematurely old."

Their poor prisoner still held a bow in his hand, and a quiver full of arrows was slung at his back.

Thongs were produced, and the prisoner's arms were quickly bound to his side. He was then mounted on the bishop's own horse, a milk-white steed, while the bishop contented himself with a dapple grey, belonging to one of his men. Taking hold of the bridle of the white horse, the bishop bade his men fall in quickly, and hasten off before anything happened to deprive them of their prisoner. So they made off as rapidly as they could.

Robin watched them out of sight, and then hurried off into the forest in the direction of the Greenwood Glade.

It chanced that the same morning Little John and Will, after Robin's departure, made up their minds to have a stroll through the forest in search of an adventure, and Robin met them as, in his woman's

guise, he hastened through the forest. He wondered whether they would recognise him, so made no sign.

The two men looked with surprise at the figure of the woman. It was an unusual thing to meet with a woman walking alone in the forest, and all their Saxon prejudices were awakened at the sight.

"This is some witch," said Little John. "I hate witches."

"Then there's ill-luck in store for us," Will observed.

"Let us shoot her," Little John proposed, "lest she bewitch us."

With that he strung his bow, and placed an arrow upon the string. Robin thought the joke had gone far enough, so snatching the cap from his head, he called out loudly upon both by name.

On hearing the well-known voice Little John dropped his bow, and then a hearty laugh told of the discovery they had made. When they came up to him, Little John declared that if Robin had not spoken, in another moment an arrow would have cleaved his heart; but Will said nothing, only he turned Robin round and round admiringly.

There was, however, no time to be lost, and Robin told them in a few words what had occurred.

"How many men are in the glade to-day?" asked Robin.

"Near upon sixty," was the reply.

"Summon them at once," said Robin, "and let us catch this bishop before he leaves the forest, and teach him another lesson about meddling with us."

By Robin's direction Will sounded his horn, and in a very short time all the men were assembled, and, armed with bows and arrows, were on their way to trap the bishop. After a couple of hours' quick walking they came out upon the high road, at a point where there was a sharp bend. After waiting some time they heard the voices of people in the distance.

There was considerable merriment going on, to judge from the noise that was made. Then a voice was heard singing a song in praise of Robin Hood, and an extra verse was added in praise of the Bishop of Hereford for capturing the outlaw. While they were loudly applauding the singer, the bishop with his prisoner came round the turn in the roadway, and a sudden silence fell upon the whole of his train. There, drawn up close beside the roadway, was a body of men, all wearing the same green dress, with plumed caps, and all armed with bows and arrows. Robin stood in the centre of the roadway, and leaned upon his bow. On getting sight of such a formidable array, the bishop was evidently much alarmed.

"Who is this man that stands so boldly in the roadway?" the bishop called out; "and who are these men that are threatening passengers on the king's highway?"

While he spoke a sudden conviction seemed to take hold of his mind, for he first looked into the face of the prisoner who rode beside him, and then at Robin standing in the roadway.

Robin made no reply to the bishop's queries.

"Marry, I think this must be the man they call Robin Hood," said the old woman.

"Then, who now are you?" the bishop asked.

"I am only a poor old woman, whom Robin Hood has oft befriended," was her reply. "Of a truth the Bishop of Hereford is a cunning man to carry off an old woman."

The bishop dropped the rein of his prisoner's horse, and his teeth were heard to chatter in his head from very fear.

His band was also alarmed at such a strong body of men, which had clustered together in the middle of the roadway.

Robin still remained silent, and the bishop, partly recovering from his fear, gave his horse a smart dig. The horse made a bolt, but Robin caught the bridle as it started, and swinging the horse round suddenly, the bishop fell off.

Robin bade Little John take care of the bishop's horse, and then advancing to the old woman, doffed his cap, and invited her to dine with him and his "merrie men," and also with the bishop and his friends, in the forest that day.

The bishop's men were then ordered to lay down their weapons, or Robin threatened to fire a shower of arrows amongst them. The men immediately threw upon the ground whatever weapons they possessed.

The bishop, after his fall, lay on the ground for some time unconscious; but no attention was paid to him, so he soon came round and sat up, looking first

at Robin's men, and then at the old woman, apparently unable to comprehend the events of the day.

At first Robin's men could not make out the meaning of what they saw, the disguise worn by the old woman was so complete. Robin explained the position of affairs in a few words, and amid roars of laughter from his men, in which many of the bishop's followers could not forbear joining.

He bade the bishop sever the woman's bonds, which his lordship did, but with a wondrously bad grace, receiving as his reward a box on the ears from the trusty dame for having had her bound so tightly. Then the old lady descended, and having swung her arms round her head once or twice, she challenged the bishop to have a stand-up fight on the spot, an honour which his lordship very resolutely declined, and seated himself on the grass again. Robin's men called out to her to "go into him, and punish him on the spot." The woman rolled up the sleeves of her green tunic, and bade the bishop stand upon his feet. But he sat still upon the grass, though it was noticed that he watched the woman's movements with a troubled look; and, as she danced about him squaring her fists in his face, and making feint strokes at his head, he dodged from her blows with amazing quickness.

It was evident that the bishop was not of a pugnacious turn of mind, or else it had all been taken out of him by his capture.

After some time had been spent in the little game, Robin called the old dame away, and remounted her upon her milk-white steed.

Robin directed some of his men to lead the way into the forest, and ordered the bishop's party to follow. The bishop was again placed on horseback, and Robin holding the bridle-rein, brought up the rear of the cavalcade. They had not proceeded far, however, before the old woman rode to the rear, and vowed, as the bishop had honoured her by riding with her so far, she would not forsake him now that she had fallen into better company.

So they passed with many jokes and gibes to the rendezvous, where preparations for a grand feast had been going on. The bishop made up his mind to suffer some rough treatment, and was silent and sullen.

On arriving at the glade, the bishop was introduced to Marian and Ellen, who welcomed him heartily, but expressed their astonishment at seeing him again.

Then the old woman was introduced, and the good turn she had done narrated, which seemed to cause immense fun.

At the feast, the bishop was placed at the head of the table, supported on one side by Marian, and on the other by the woman, who still wore her disguise, and such marked attentions were paid to the bishop as he had never received before even from his own people. He had very little appetite, however, for thinking of what would succeed. His men, on the contrary, ate heartily, and fraternised with Robin's men right warmly.

After dinner, Robin called for the bill, and Little John brought in a strip of parchment, which was

written all over with the quaintest devices, and looking at the bottom, he declared that the bishop had £1000 to pay.

His lordship heard the sum-total with a groan.

Robin bade Will ascertain the contents of the bishop's saddle-bags.

Little John had set two men to watch these during dinner, having discovered, by a slight examination, that they contained that which would reward a closer search.

Will unfastened the saddle-bags, and poured the contents of the bags out on a mantle. On being counted, it was found that there was just £500.

This, by Robin's direction, was immediately transferred to a certain strong box, of which only the leaders knew the exact situation. Turning to the bishop, Robin inquired how he would pay the remainder.

The bishop declared that he would do anything that Robin pleased, and made loud protestations of his great respect for him, whereat Robin only laughed.

"What is the worth of a promise?" Robin demanded; but the bishop attempted no reply.

Robin said he would forgive his guest on condition that he complied with his request, which was, first that he would sing a mass for him and his men.

At first the bishop refused, whereupon Robin had him bound to a tree, and he vowed that he should never be released until he did what he had been asked.

After a little delay, the bishop began in a voice the

very opposite to that proceeding from a joyous heart; and all Robin's men and his own standing round, mass was sung through.

Night was now advancing, and Robin generously declared he would at that time impose no further condition. He assisted the bishop to mount his dapple grey, preparatory to taking leave of his host. But the bishop protested that it was a horse unworthy for a bishop to ride, and prayed that he might have his milk-white steed again. Robin said the white horse he had himself given to the old woman, and it was not likely she would be willing to give it up to him without a recompence.

The bishop had no money left, therefore he could not buy, and Robin declared he had taken a fancy to it, and should become a purchaser.

Thereat the bishop grew angry, and stormed at Robin, calling him wild names. So, for a punishment, he was dragged from the horse, and then made to mount with his face to the horse's tail, which was given to him in his hand to hold. In this way he was conducted through the forest a considerable distance, to the merriment of all the men. At parting, Robin gave him a friendly hint, that the next time he came to capture him, he was to be sure and not make any such mistake as he had committed that day.

Months elapsed, and Robin and his band remained in undisturbed possession of the forest; but then news came that the sheriff, Inluck, had made such representations to the king, seconded by the bishop of Hereford and other prelates, as had induced him to

dispatch a fresh force of soldiers to Nottingham. These men had instructions to remain until they had succeeded in capturing Robin, and dispersing the members of his band.

Upon hearing this, Robin disposed of all the movable goods he possessed ; and having divided all the money amongst the band, preparations were made for an encounter with the soldiers.

Marian, Ellen, Friar Tuck, and one or two others who were not fighters, but very useful members of the band, were directed to remain in the Greenwood Glade, and not to depart thence without Robin's directions.

Robin did not remain undisturbed very long. In the latter part of 1212, a scout from Nottingham brought him intelligence of the arrival of the king's soldiers, and the very next day the royal proclamation concerning Robin was read in the market-place. A large reward was offered for his capture, and severe penalties threatened for those who should, after that notice, give succour to him in any shape or way. There were many of Robin's friends who heard the announcement, and forthwith took steps to acquaint him with what had taken place.

On a given day, the whole band marched into the forest in search of Robin. They wandered along the forest roads, and lost themselves amongst the trees ; but day after day passed without their ever seeing any signs of Robin and his band. The only intimation of his presence in the forest was the occasional sound of a horn ; but the more they sought to trace the sound, the more bewildered did they become ; and each suc-

ceeding day they returned to Nottingham weary and despairing of success.

After several weeks had elapsed, the soldiers having become dispirited, Robin determined to try their patience by a trick. He divided his band into six portions, so that no more than ten men were under any one leader; and these bands were directed to sound a horn occasionally as they wandered in the innermost recesses of the forest. The leader of the soldiers came to a conclusion similar in purpose, and divided his band into parties of twenty, giving them instructions to search the forest thoroughly.

Robin found out what had been done, and immediately joined his sections. Then he marched them to a part where a band of soldiers was likely to pass, and ordered them to conceal themselves behind the trees. The sound of a horn soon attracted the notice of one of the small bands of soldiers, and Robin managed to shew himself once or twice without exciting their suspicion, and very adroitly led them to the spot where all his men were concealed. One or two of the soldiers more eager than the others advanced to lay hold of Robin, who called out in a loud voice, "The king's soldiers!" the next moment his men appeared, and the soldiers found themselves surrounded by a force outnumbering them three times. The forest rovers had arrows fitted to their bows, and Robin called upon the soldiers to lay down their arms or they were all dead men. After some shew of resistance the men laid down their arms, which were collected by two of Robin's men, and

then the forest rovers bound the soldiers with leather thongs to the trees, and left them. He sounded his horn several times, and then Robin and his men moved forward hastily, in hopes of intercepting another party of soldiers. In a few seconds there was the sound of another horn, and the forest rovers a second time hid themselves behind the trees. Then Robin leaned his back against a tree, and blew three loud blasts. These were not answered, but Robin's sharp ear caught the sound of coming footsteps, and in a few minutes a second band of twenty men made their appearance. This was headed by the commander of the whole force, Sir Thomas Bullhead, an impetuous young officer, fresh from London life, whose zeal had attracted the king's notice, in certain enterprises in which he had employed him. His attention had been attracted by the sound of the horn, and he led his men forward without delay. He fell into the trap Robin had prepared for him very speedily, and was within a few yards of Robin before a single suspicion was aroused. Sir Thomas, in a commanding tone, called upon Robin to lay down his bow, and submit to the clemency of the king.

Robin made no reply, but stood still.

Sir Thomas immediately advanced to him, laid a hand upon his shoulder, and said, "You are my prisoner."

A hearty laugh was the only response.

Not knowing what to make out of him, Sir Thomas got into a rage, and repeated, in a still louder tone of

voice, "I say, thou forest rover, thou art my prisoner!"

"Not quite," quoth Robin; and then he shouted aloud, "In the name of Robin Hood, my men!"

Instantly there appeared all the members of his band; they completely encircled the soldiers, and the gallant Sir Thomas in a moment saw he had been caught.

It was now Robin's turn. He laid his hand upon the shoulder of the knight, and said, "Thou art my prisoner, Sir Knight, and thy men must lay down their arms at once, as the purchase of their lives."

The knight looked round him with a troubled countenance, and, seeing the odds so great against him, immediately ordered his men to lay down their arms.

The arms were collected, and the men were afterwards bound to trees like their comrades had been; but for this purpose they were led away from the spot where they had submitted.

Sir Thomas was sorely troubled when he saw them led away, one by one, bound; but Robin assured him that no life should be taken.

When all had been bound save Sir Thomas, Robin led him into that part of the forest whither his men had been taken, and then he discovered, to his surprise, that not fewer than forty men were bound to the trees. As he was led amongst the trees, some of the captives could not restrain a smile at seeing their commander in the same mess as themselves.

Robin afterwards made him kneel upon the ground,

and take an oath upon his sword that he would never molest a forest rover again. This the knight swore. He was then bound to a tree.

At parting, Robin gave him a horn, and bade him sound it lustily after he had departed, and it would be sure to bring help and relief.

Leaving them in this state, Robin took his departure, carrying away with him all the arms belonging to the soldiers. When they had got some distance away they heard the sound of the horn, and before long there was another horn sounded, so that the forest rovers concluded that help was at hand for the soldiers, and that they would not have to spend a night in the forest.

On being released, Sir Thomas told an exaggerated story of the force that Robin had; and the same night in Nottingham, he summoned the sheriff and the governor of the castle, and demanded that a large number of soldiers should at once be furnished to him, to strengthen his own band, and complete the capture of the noted outlaw.

After several days had elapsed, Robin found that fresh soldiers were in the forest, searching it in every direction. He found the greatest difficulty in keeping clear of these men. At length the search became so unpleasantly severe, that Robin determined to disband his force, and retire for a time. Summoning all his band, he told them of his intention, and directed them to repair to the neighbouring villages, and remain there until the search ceased, and then he promised he would return again.

The forest was so closely invested that, for several days after they had arrived at this determination, the men dared not move out of their glade. At length they managed, by leaving a few at a time, to reduce the number left behind. Two messengers were dispatched to Lea Castle, asking that a few of the band might be allowed to take refuge in the castle for a time.

On receiving the message, the knight arrayed himself as one of the king's soldiers, and hastened into the forest to escort Robin and his friends to the castle.

Robin, however, refused to take shelter in the castle himself, on account of the risk to Sir Richard, but declared he should retire into some of the northern forests, where he would remain until all was quiet in Sherwood again. It was arranged that Marian, Ellen, Alan, and Friar Tuck should return with the knight, and Robin accompanied them to the border of the forest, where he took a hurried leave of Marian and the others.

Little John and Will were of the party, but they returned with Robin. While engaged in leave-taking, Little John declared he caught a glimpse of a soldier, hid near the knight's castle, and this hastened the trio on their return.

The soldier that Little John had seen was a spy, who had been sent from Nottingham to watch the castle; and this man, taking Alan for Robin Hood, returned to Sir Thomas Bullhead, and acquainted him with the supposed hiding-place of the noted outlaw.

To the surprise of those in the castle, two days after the arrival of the fugitives a large force came marching up to the castle, under the command of Sir Thomas Bullhead. He demanded the instant surrender of the castle, in the name of the king.

Sir Richard asked upon what grounds the surrender of the castle was required, to which Sir Thomas replied, that he had certain information that Robin Hood and a number of his followers were there, under his protection. Sir Richard denied that such was the case, and asserted that beyond his own family he only had some poor women, who had asked for shelter from him for a short time, which he had not refused. But Sir Thomas persisted in his demand, threatening, if the refusal was still persevered in, to invest the place, and take it by storm.

Sir Richard indignantly refused to give up possession of his castle, and warned Sir Thomas, that whatever befell his men the responsibility would rest upon his shoulders.

When Robin and Little John were on their way to the Greenwood Glade they very narrowly escaped capture. A number of soldiers came suddenly upon them, and it was only by the superior fleetness of the rovers that they escaped.

They afterwards agreed to part company.

That night they spent in the glade together, and the next morning took leave of each other for a time.

After parting from Little John, Robin took a path through the forest intending to get into Cumberland,

but was turned out of his way, by finding that a party of the military were before him. He changed his route, determining to escape south; but, after travelling several miles, he discovered another party of soldiers. This time he was not so fortunate as before, for some of the soldiers caught sight of him. There was nothing left now but to run for his life. He was within three miles of the abbey of Kirklees, where at that time Marian Pinkerly was abbess, and she fortunately was a relative of Robin's. Thither he suddenly made up his mind to escape. He had not run many yards before he heard an arrow whistling in the trees behind him, and knew by that he was pursued. Robin was a fleet runner, and had little doubt but that he could distance his enemies. He kept steadily on at a rattling pace, until he saw before him on the top of a hill a huge white cross, which he knew marked the boundary of the abbey lands, and once within that line he was safe.

His pursuers seemed conscious also of the purpose he had in view, and Robin, as he neared the cross, saw that the soldiers had divided into two bands, and one had taken a circuitous route, so as to cut off his gaining the abbey.

On discovering this, Robin put on extra speed. It was a race for life, and the odds were greatly against him. He reached the top of the hill, nearly a quarter of a mile ahead of his pursuers. The abbey was then in sight, although distant a full mile. Had he paused then, although he might have claimed sanctuary, it would scarcely have been heeded, and

in the anger of the moment he might have been slain on the spot. He rapidly approached the abbey. The door of the church was open. Almost spent, he ran into the sacred edifice, and sank down exhausted at the altar.

Several nuns were in church at the time. One immediately ran to acquaint the abbess, and a second offered Robin water to drink. In a few minutes the abbess entered, accompanied by several nuns. Robin was lying full length upon the ground.

“Unhappy man,” said the abbess, “what crime hast thou committed that thou shouldst need sanctuary?”

“I am Robin Hood, thy kinsman,” was the reply.





CHAPTER XXVI.

Robin in Sanctuary at Kirklees—He takes the Vows of a Penitent—
His Journey and Adventures at Scarborough—Little Robby Reft
—Robin captures a French Vessel of War.

THE good abbess was bending over Robin as she spoke, but, on hearing his name, she uttered an exclamation of surprise. The nuns repeated his name, as though incredulous that the man before them was the noted outlaw. They had not recovered from their surprise, when a number of the soldiers who had been pursuing him entered the church, and, going up to the altar, attempted to drag Robin away. But the abbess interposed, and declared that no man should lay a finger upon Robin.

In the course of twenty minutes about thirty soldiers strode into the church, and thronged around the altar. Last in the race arrived Sir Thomas Bullhead.

He was immensely pleased at finding Robin in his power, as he thought, but was prevented from dragging him off, as he desired, by the decided





manner of the abbess, who stood by Robin's side, and authoritatively told them that the laws of the church and of the land would not permit of such an outrage being committed as that of removing a man away from sanctuary.

Sir Thomas fumed and stormed, but it was all to no purpose.

There stood Robin, with folded arms, leaning against the crucifix, by his side Marian Pinkerly, the good abbess, with pale face and thin compressed lips. Round about her, and within the altar rails, stood several of the nuns, with hands clasped, and engaged in earnest prayer. In front of these were the armed soldiers, whose movements and voices filled the church with strange sounds. The sun was shining through the painted windows, and cast rainbow hues upon the gravestones of pious women or noted warriors.

Though very much disappointed at Robin's escape from their clutches, yet, nevertheless, the men shewed a certain amount of reverence for the place, and for the holy women who were protecting him. With their caps in their hands, they hung about the altar, waiting for the instructions of their leader.

Robin took no part in the discussion of his fate, but stood silent the while.

The abbess ordered Sir Thomas to remove his men from the church, and he at length, very reluctantly, gave them orders to retire, and surround the church so as to prevent his escape. They were posted about the building in such a way that, had

Robin attempted to leave it, he must have fallen into the hands of some of them.

After the men had retired, the doors were closed, and no one was allowed to enter without the express permission of the abbess.

Over the altar there burned a little lamp, and when night set in this was the only light within the sacred edifice. Before she left, the abbess placed a quantity of stuff used for covering the altar on special occasions on the ground for Robin to lie on, and then he was left for the night to sleep, perchance to dream,—to dream of freedom, of bright forest scenes, of Marian, to wake, and watch the dim light trembling as it swung to and fro above the altar.

With the early grey of dawn, before the first bright rays of sunlight penetrated the building, the nuns came to the church with the good abbess, to chant the early morning hymns. Robin knelt throughout the service, with head bared, and arms crossed like a penitent. He remained in the church for several days, and was supplied with refreshments by the abbess, and the soldiers without were also supplied with food.

At length Robin, tired out with his inactivity, consented to confess his crimes, and leave the country, but stipulated that he should not be branded.

Sir Thomas Bullhead was sent for, and he agreed to the terms proposed ; and then Bully, the coroner from Nottingham, was summoned. He came, and brought with him several monks.

Robin was led by the abbess to the church door,

and, standing with his hand upon a crucifix, he repeated these words:—

“ This hear thou, Sir Coroner, that I, Robin Hood, am an outlaw, and because I have done evil in this land, I do abjure the land of our Lord John, King of England ; and I will haste me to the port which thou shalt give me ; and I will not go out of the highway, nor turn to the right hand, nor to the left ; and if I do, I do, and will consent that I be taken as a rebel and outlaw of our lord the king ; and at that port I will diligently seek for passage ; nor will I tarry there more than one flood and ebb, if I can have passage ; and unless I can have passage, I will go every day into the sea up to my knees assaying to pass over ; and unless I can do this within forty days, I will again put myself into the church as an outlaw of my lord the king ; so God me help by his holy judgment, and all saints and angels, and by this blessed cross.”

After taking this oath, the coroner assigned him the port of Scarborough ; and the abbess gave him a palmer's dress, and a cross which he was to carry in his hand the whole way.

He then bade the abbess adieu, thanking her heartily for her goodness, and started forth for the forest once again, on his way to the port that had been assigned to him.

He passed through several villages where some of his men were located. These invariably accompanied him a short distance on his journey, Robin assuring them all that he would soon be back in their midst

again. He said his capture would result in the withdrawal of the soldiers from Sherwood, and after he had fulfilled all the requirements of the law he should return once more.

After many days' journeying he reached Scarborough. He found the inhabitants very much excited, in consequence of an anticipated descent upon their shores by the French. There were many ships in the harbour, yet none of them would venture out to sea, and some of these vessels had been lying in harbour for several weeks. Failing to obtain a ship Robin, in accordance with the terms of his obligation, went each day into the sea up to his knees, assaying to pass over to some other land. One day, as he was returning from the fulfilment of his obligation, his attention was attracted by loud cries. He saw an old man being dragged roughly by a soldier, who bore a cross upon his breast, signifying that he had served in the Crusades. The old man's son was pleading with the inhuman soldier on his father's behalf. The man's crime consisted in his being a Saxon, and having a store of money, which he had refused to disclose. Another soldier had dismounted from his horse, and was watching the affray from some rocks above. Robin would have interposed, but at the moment he saw a company of soldiers approaching, and knew that his interference would only result in a worse disaster to the old man, and probably death to himself. Every day stories of similar outrages were being told amongst the people, and Robin declared he would rather that the French

should come, to give the soldiers some work, than that they should be left alone, to despoil the inhabitants of the place.

Amongst the fishermen he heard strange stories of the attacks made by the French upon their boats, when they would carry off all the fish, and sometimes the men, whom they cast into French jails.

One who had been carried off in this way had been master of several fishing-boats, and he had died in captivity. His widow Robin became acquainted with through mixing with the fishermen, and he was induced to take up his abode at her house. The poor woman's name was Reft, and Robin found that she had a large family. He soon became a great favourite in the house. One of her fishing-vessels only had been left her, all the rest having been captured during her husband's lifetime. This one was manned by a number of men, who shared with the widow the results of their enterprise. The fishermen, however, were so much afraid of capture, that for nearly a month no vessel had been out to sea. Robin determined to try his luck ; and, by dint of considerable persuasion, succeeded in inducing a number of men to accompany him.

The fishing-boat was called "The Lion."

One calm bright evening they started from Scarborough for a night's fishing. The sun was shining on the sea as they sailed out. There was scarce a ripple upon the water ; a gentle wind breathing upon the sails shot the boat dancing through the water. The master, Robin, and the other men sat in the stern of

the boat. When they had got clear of the bay, the beauty of the scene was very striking. The boat seemed to skim over the face of the water like a bird, and it left a streak of white foam behind to mark its path through the water.

"It is just a twelve-month and a day," said the master, "since little Robby Reft died on board this boat."

"Poor little fellow!" ejaculated the men, shaking their heads.

"How did it happen?" asked Robin.

"Why," said the master, "Robby was the youngest son of the governor, and he used to come out with us fishing. He had never a lad but this one, the others were girls. He was a pretty little chubby-faced rogue, with hair as black as night, and as curly as a wave. He was only three years old, but a forwarder one I never set eyes upon. He would cast his line into the water and fish like a man, and once he caught a fish he couldn't pull up, and his father laughed till he almost tumbled overboard. Robby had been ailing a little, and he cried a bit before he came, because his mother wanted him to stop at home. It was a grand evening, and we were to be back next morning. I carried him down to the boat, and he threw over his line as soon as he got in, and watched for a bite. His father had the tiller. The wind came, filled the sails, and we were quickly skimming over the water like we are now. On we kept until we came to the right spot, and then over went our lines. Well, that time Robby caught three little fish, and he laughed like the water

does sometimes as it runs past the rudder,—it was a hearty laugh that puckered his face like the water itself. The sun set that night blood-red ; there was not a cloud in the sky, and there was a blood-red trail upon the water which reached to the stern of the boat. Little Robby clapped his hands, and said the sun was bleeding ; and he would dip his little hands in the sea, and cried out that he had caught the sun's blood. Then he was sorely puzzled how to make out that the water was red in the sea but white in his hands. His father laughed ; we all laughed, and were as merry as men who had no trouble in their heads.

“ When the sun had fairly set, all of a sudden Robby began to cry, and put his little hand up to his head. He said he had a pain, and went very red in the face, and his father couldn't make out what was up. So he carried him into the cabin, and we made a bed of our coats and laid him down, and he went very quiet. Thus the night passed. His father would keep stepping to the cabin to peep at him, and each time he would raise his little head and say, ‘ Father, do you love me ? ’

“ His father would say, ‘ Ay, ay lad, very much ; ’ then his little head would drop upon his pillow, and his father would give him a kiss before stepping back to his line. .

“ In the early morning, just before dawn, little Robby cries out, ‘ Father ! father ! I want to see the stars, take me up. ’

“ So his father brought him up, and he lay on his father's lap, in the stern.

"He looked up and said, 'Father, where are all the stars gone, I thought there were more?'

"The light was just about to break, and scarce a star could be seen.

"'Where are they gone, Robby?' repeated his father. 'Why, they're gone behind the clouds.'

"'Who put them behind the clouds?' asked Robby.

"'Gentle Jesus,' replied his father.

"'Have the stars got hands?' said Robby.

"'No, my child!'

"'Can they sing?'

"'Ay, a heavenly song.'

"'What do they sing?'

"'Glory, hallelujah!' answered his father. That was what he'd heard the priest say.

"'Shall we go and see the stars?' said Robby.

"'Ay,' was the father's response, 'when gentle Jesus calls us.'

"'What will gentle Jesus say?'

"'Little Robby, come up here and see the pretty blue sky, and the bright stars, and the beautiful angels.'

"'But I won't go without father.' Little Robby says, 'Won't gentle Jesus call thee too?'

"'Ay, some day,' his father said; but all the while he cried, for nobody ever heard such questions from a child before; but he repeated, 'Ay, some day, Robby.'

"'Shall we go to-morrow?'

"'No, no, Robby darling; but some day we will.'

"'Well, which is the way?' quoth the child.

"'Straight up,' said his father.

"'In the boat?' asked Robby.

“ ‘No, no ; we shall go up in the air like a gull.’

“ After that Robby was a bit still, and we thought he was going to sleep ; but all of a sudden he opened his eyes again, and whispered, ‘ Father, father ! gentle Jesus is calling us now ! ’ and with that his little head fell on his father’s arm.

“ We were very still then, because we were sure he was sleeping, and he was indeed asleep, for he never woke again.

“ When we found that he was really dead, we could not believe our senses ; we said, ‘ Master, he’s dead ; ’ but his father said, ‘ No, he isn’t,’ and he was angry because we spoke. His father held him in his arms for hours, while the boat lay still upon the water. He didn’t seem to mind what we did ; and we set the sail, turning the boat for home, and still he sat in the stern silent and sad, with little Robby on his lap. When we ran the boat ashore, he got up, carried the child to the house, laid him down, and said, ‘ He’s dead,’ and nothing more.

“ His wife burst out crying, and the children cried, but he never said a word, and didn’t seem to know what he was doing. That same night he came down to the shore, and without any one knowing what he was about, he takes the best of his boats and sails away out to sea. The next morning he was seen by a Scarborough boat, and they asked him what luck ; and he said, ‘ I haven’t caught the lad yet, but I soon shall.’ They couldn’t make out what he meant ; but as they sailed away they saw a French vessel come up, and Reft was seen no more.”

"Was nothing ever heard of him again?" Robin Hood inquired.

"Months afterwards," said the master, "a sailor escaped here from a French jail, and when they spoke to him, he remembered a man being brought in who had nothing else to say but 'Where's Robby? Have any of you seen Robby?' and two days afterwards he died raging mad."

"Look at the sun now," exclaimed Robin, "it's blood-red."

"That's just as it looked the day before little Robby died," said the master; "and I say, before we get back there'll be blood shed somewhere upon the water, and some of us, if we get back, will have a strange tale to tell."

Presently the wind freshened, and Robin began to experience some of those unpleasant consequences which follow upon a first trip to sea. In a few minutes he was lying prostrate with sea-sickness, to the amazement of his fellows, who thought he had been an old hand.

He rose, staggered to his feet, but a sudden lurch of the boat sent him rolling up against the mast. Catching hold of this to steady himself, he tried to gain the side of the boat, but another lurch took him, and sent him head first on to the deck again.

His comrades began to laugh at him, called him a land-lubber, and bade him fish for his sea legs. Then they mocked him, and offered him loose ropes wherewith to steady himself.

The men cast their lines overboard, and the master

vowed that if Robin would not fish, no share of what the others caught should fall to him. A line was given him, and he immediately cast it into the sea, without a bait upon his hook, and when the others pulled up their lines with big fish at the end, they laughed at Robin, and told him he would have to hook his fish on or he would catch none.

At length one of them pulled up Robin's line, and found he had no bait upon the end, then they all roared with laughter.

As the night wore on the wind freshened, and the waves rolled high. So they had to give up fishing, and it took all their skill to keep the head of the boat before the wind. All night they toiled on the sea, but Robin was unable to render the slightest assistance, and the merriment of the men changed to vexation; and Robin made a secret vow that he would never venture out to sea again, but would return to Sherwood or some other forest, or else he would offer the services of himself and his men to the king, to fight the French on land.

When morning dawned the wind went down, and the sea became calm again, so they resumed their fishing, and were very successful.

At length a sail was discovered on the horizon, and the master cried out that it was a French vessel of war, and they made sail with what haste they could to escape. The wind, however, baffled them, and the French ship came upon them very quickly.

Robin, who was recovering from his sickness, bade

them not to be afraid, for he would shoot every man on board.

But the master declared that Robin was nothing but a braggart and a boaster, and threatened to throw him overboard.

Robin secretly fetched his bow and arrows from the cabin, and called upon the master to fasten him to the mast, and leave him there.

A rope was brought, and Robin was accordingly fastened to the mast, in such a position that, however much the vessel lurched, he would still be upon his legs. As the French vessel came within bow-shot, Robin fitted an arrow to his bow, and took aim at a man whom he saw on the bow of the vessel. The arrow pierced the man's heart, and he fell dead into the sea. When the master and the men saw the Frenchman fall, they cried out that they were indeed all dead men. But before they could do anything to prevent him, Robin had loosed another shaft, and a second Frenchman fell. When Robin's friends saw this, their fears were changed to hopes, and they cried out, "Well done; shoot again!"

In an instant another shot brought a third Frenchman plump into the sea. The two vessels were so close now, that Robin and the others could hear a great hubbub on board their adversary. He continued shooting arrow after arrow, and every shaft brought a Frenchman down, either on to the deck or into the sea.

Robin's stock of arrows were nearly exhausted,

when, to his great joy, a white flag was hoisted on the French vessel.

Then the master's skill was called into requisition again, and, at Robin's request, the fishing-boat was laid alongside the French vessel.

Robin cast off the rope with which he was fastened, and was the first man to board their prize. On reaching the deck, he found the dead lying in every direction, and wounded soldiers and sailors crawling about. The very first shaft that Robin fired had killed the commander, and caused considerable confusion on board. During the storms of the two previous nights they had been obliged to throw overboard every weapon with which the vessel had been supplied, and the crossbows belonging to the soldiers had been rendered unfit for service by the salt water. They had no arms left but their swords, and they were useless against Robin's bow and arrows.

His shafts had flown so quickly, and with such deadly results, that the Frenchmen were panic-stricken, and those who were unwounded surrendered the vessel.

On getting on board, the survivors laid their swords at Robin's feet, and submitted to be bound.

When they searched the ship, they found, to their amazement, an immense quantity of money, to the value of several thousand pounds.

Robin declared that one half of what had been taken should go to the widow Reft, and the other half should be divided equally amongst the master and the men, his companions.

The master objected, because, he said, if it had not been for Robin they would all have been carried prisoners to France; and the remainder of the men joined with the master in declaring that the whole of the prize by right belonged to Robin.

The master begged pardon for the way in which they had treated Robin, and the other men likewise begged Robin's forgiveness. He bade them not to think any more of what had passed, but immediately prepare to return home.

They cast overboard all the dead bodies that lay about the deck, and hoisted the sails to make all the haste they could to reach Scarborough. Fortunately for them they had a fair wind, and came within sight of land without meeting with another French vessel.

The appearance of the foreign ship created an intense alarm in the town. Far out at sea the outline had been recognised, and the worst fears of the people were, apparently, about to be realised. All were puzzled at seeing the little fishing vessel keeping her company, though people were not long in suggesting that the little fishing craft had been captured, and that the fishermen had been compelled to pilot the war vessel into port.

The men of the braver sort armed themselves as quickly as possible, and placed themselves under the direction of the commander of the king's soldiers. There were no valuables on board the ships in the harbour, and the men belonging to them cared but little about their seizure.

Many were puzzled to account for the fact that

only one vessel thus approached the shore; but others insisted that many more before nightfall would follow.

On board the vessel, eyes were strained to catch a glimpse of the usual groups of men hanging about the sands, and the fishermen were much perplexed at the appearance of the deserted town. When they had come fairly within hail, the master hoisted the only flag he had on the mast of the French ship, and over the French colours.

Some faint cheers were heard on shore to proceed from those on the ship, and this brought some of the people on land into sight.

Robin and the master ascended the masts, and waved their caps, shouting; and at length the people and the soldiers guessed what had happened, and came in crowds down to the shore to look at the ship and the men.

Anchor was at length cast. Robin landed, while the master remained in possession of the ship.

The widow Reft was on the sands. Some sharp eyes had discovered the shape of her fishing-boat, and carried her the intelligence of the supposed capture.

On landing, Robin quickly told his tale to the people and the soldiers, and the greatest enthusiasm prevailed. The French prisoners were landed, and at night there were bonfires kindled in every direction in honour of the event. The poor woman Reft could hardly believe her senses as bag after bag of gold was brought out and carried into her house. Each of

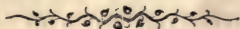
the men had a greater store of gold to carry away as his share than he had ever borne away in weight of fish, and was received by more friends on shore than he had ever known before.

The master and the men seemed never tired of repeating the story of Robin's skill and bravery, and the pitch of excitement grew to such an intensity that the people forcibly laid hold of Robin, mounted him on the shoulders of some strong men, and carried him up and down the place.

The commander of the king's soldiers sent for the nearest coroner, and ordered that Robin should be formally released from his oath; and in place of his palmer's dress the garb of a king's soldier was put upon him.

The vessel was bought for the use of the king, and the division of the money between the widow and the crew of the fishing-vessel confirmed.

Robin declared he would not take away with him more money than would suffice for his spending until he reached Nottingham. But the widow and the commander insisted upon his having a large share of the booty; and with this Robin ordered that a number of houses should be built and endowed, for the use of poor widows. The most tempting offers were made to Robin to induce him to remain. He refused all; and when the day of parting at last came, the people escorted him a long distance on his journey.





CHAPTER XXVII.

Little John and Will take part in a Shooting Match, and go into the Forest—Robin meets with his Band again—Little John is Captured by the Sheriff—Robin slays Sir Guy of Gisborne—Release of Little John—Inluck creates a Panic at midnight amongst the Soldiers.

DURING Robin's absence, Marian and the others had spent the whole of their time in the hospitable castle of Sir Richard of the Lea.

The story of Robin's capture at the Abbey of Kirk-lee had been reported to Sir Richard, and he had communicated it to Alan and the friar; but it had been kept from the knowledge of the others. They also heard of Robin's escape, and believed firmly that he would return as he had promised at no very distant date.

The Sheriff of Nottingham was overjoyed at the news of Robin's capture, and chuckled over it with almost as much pleasure as if he had accomplished it himself. Of the members of Robin's band, some had settled in the villages to which they belonged, while

others had obtained a precarious livelihood by poaching in the forest. Little John and Will had occasional meetings in Nottingham, but never made their appearance there without having a row with the sheriff's men. These disturbances waxed so fierce, that both Little John and Will entertained seriously the advisability of betaking themselves to the forest again, and summoning the remaining members of the band around them. Their proposition was precipitated into action by an event which took place in the May of 1214.

The sheriff had announced a grand shooting match, as was usual, to celebrate the return of May. The prizes were a bow with silver ends, and an arrow pointed with silver in like manner.

Little John determined that he would be present at the match; and Will was dispatched to several of the neighbouring hamlets to acquaint the members of Robin's old band.

In consequence of this, there met together a very large number of Robin's men, who found themselves once more pitted against the foresters, and a number of the sheriff's men.

The sheriff walked up and down the square where the match was fixed to take place, to gratify his vanity by displaying himself in the presence of, as he trusted, an admiring assemblage.

The result of the shooting match was, that Little John was declared the winner of the prize, which occasioned considerable dissatisfaction amongst the sheriff's men.

The foresters took part with the sheriff's men, and

declared that Little John was none other than an outlaw, and that he should never carry away the prize. It had already been presented to him, and he held it in his hand. On hearing the grumblings amongst the men, he bade the best amongst them take the bow from him. A *melée* ensued, in which many of the sheriff's men were seriously injured, and Little John and his party were obliged to escape to the woods.

The sheriff was very much enraged at what had occurred, and offered a large reward for the capture of the men who had created the disturbance.

The very day when the forest rovers escaped from Nottingham and entered the forest, Robin, by one of those singular chances which are sometimes heard of, entered the forest on his way from Scarborough, and was slowly sauntering along, his mind filled with pleasant recollections of the many happy days he had spent there. Though his absence had been but short, it seemed to him an age. He carried in his hand his bow, and a well-filled quiver hung at his back. From his waist hung his old horn, and remembering that it was the merry month of May, a strong fancy seized him once more to wake the echoes in the forest. So, placing the horn to his lips, he blew three loud and shrill blasts. He stood still while the echoes lingered in the air, and then, to his astonishment, he heard the sound of men's voices in the forest. Before he had time to recover from his surprise, he found himself surrounded by a number of his old and faithful men. The meeting was so unexpected, and the joy so heart-felt, that Robin had some difficulty in restraining the

men. They shook him by the hand, and clasped him round the legs. Some cried, others laughed, and then all shouted, "Hurrah!" Robin was just as pleased himself, though not so demonstrative in his manner.

They all repaired to the old places of meeting, the two glades where the houses were erected, and to Robin's surprise he found that preparations for a feast were going forward, and that night, as in former times, they celebrated the return of summer to the grand old forest of Sherwood.

The following morning Robin repaired to the castle of Sir Richard, where he was welcomed very heartily by his friends. Marian's joy knew no bounds, and they vowed they would never again be parted in life. After remaining a day at the castle, Sir Richard parted with his guests, but not without many regrets; and they were told by his kind lady always to regard the castle as their safest retreat. Robin's circle being once more complete, he started for his Greenwood home.

As they returned through the forest, they came upon one of the sheriff's men, who had ventured all alone into the forest in search of Little John. Robin took from him the weapons he wore, and sent him back to the sheriff with a message, that Robin Hood was once more to be found in the wood, and would be very glad to meet with the sheriff at any time.

The sheriff was not a little disconcerted at the news which his man brought, and immediately made proclamation in the market-place that a large reward would be given for the capture of Robin.

Many expeditions were set on foot for this purpose, but all without avail. Those sent returned to Nottingham, either wearied out with wandering through the forest, or with bruised heads and sides, and without weapons, having met with some of Robin's men.

Several months passed, and winter came. Robin and his band were locked up in their houses by the winter snows. Merry days and nights were those spent that winter in the forest; at length spring came again. The warm sun breathed upon the forest, and the snows disappeared. Spring flowers peeped out, and the birds began to sing their summer songs. Robin's men went out to pick up what information they could of the intentions of the sheriff Inluck. Upon one of these excursions Little John met with a sad adventure. He had gone in the direction of Nottingham, and meeting with no one, entered the town. He was recognised by some of the sheriff's men, who immediately determined to capture him. Hearing a noise behind him, he turned and saw a crowd collecting. Remembering what had happened on former occasions he took to his heels and ran to the nearest gate. Having the start of them, he succeeded in passing the gate before they could stop him. He was not, however, free from all danger, for he had not got many hundred yards from the walls, when, hearing a great cry behind him, he turned and saw about sixty men armed with bows and arrows in hot pursuit after him, and the sheriff at their head mounted on a horse. First of all, Little John determined to draw them as far into the forest as he could, then make a stand and do what

mischief he could with his arrows, believing that afterwards he would have no difficulty in making his escape. Once or twice, when he turned his head, he noticed that the sheriff kept with his men, instead of riding in advance of them. When they had got a considerable distance from the town, Little John fitted an arrow to his bow, turned and discharged it amongst the sheriff's men, knocking over the man nearest the sheriff. Unfortunately, the string of his bow broke with the effort, and he was pretty much at the mercy of his enemies.

Meanwhile the men came on, urged by the sheriff's voice, and the promise of a large reward. Little John's temporary stoppage enabled them to gain so much upon him that they quickly ran him down and captured him.

The same day Robin, straying through the forest, bent upon a little pleasant excursion and nothing more, came upon a knight fully armed.

"Good morning," quoth Robin.

"Good morning," replied the stranger. "Methinks by the bow thou bearest in thy hand, thou should'st be a good archer."

Said Robin, "I never boast."

Quoth the stranger, "I wish I could meet with Robin Hood, and then I would try my skill against his."

"If thou wilt come with me," said Robin, "we may chance to meet with him in the forest; and I should like nothing better than to see you together."

"If thou wilt lead me to him," the knight replied, "I will give thee £10 for thy pains."

"Agreed," said Robin; "but first let us have some pastime under the trees, for I flatter myself I am not a bad shot."

The stranger agreed to the proposal, and Robin cut a thin wand which he set up. At the first shot Robin's arrow passed within an inch of the mark. The stranger shot, but did not get within a foot of it.

The second time they fired Robin cleft the wand; but the stranger again missed, his arrow flying wide of the mark.

"Thou art a good shot," said the stranger; "if Robin Hood can beat thee, he must be a good shot indeed. But tell me, where dost thou come from?"

"Do thou tell me first what is thy name!" said Robin.

"I am Sir Guy of Gisborne," said the stranger; "and I have sworn to the sheriff of Nottingham that I will find Robin Hood, and fight him until one of us is slain."

"And I am willing," was Robin's reply; "thou wilt not have to search long, for I am Robin Hood."

Sir Guy started on finding that he had been in such close proximity to the noted outlaw, and clapped his hand upon his sword.

Both drew their swords, and immediately fell to. Robin found that he had an awkward opponent to deal with, for Sir Guy was a celebrated swordsman, and dealt such strokes as Robin had not been accustomed to. After they had been fighting for some time Robin stumbled over the root of a tree. Sir Guy being remarkably nimble, hit him a heavy blow

on his left side, and knocked Robin half senseless to the ground. Sir Guy stepped backward for one moment, then raising his sword he advanced for the purpose of giving his foe the finishing stroke; but Robin was aware of the knight's purpose, and breathing a word or two in prayer, sudden strength returned to him, he sprang up quickly, and with one blow from his sword, he struck the knight lifeless to the ground.

After satisfying himself that the knight was really dead, Robin rested a while, and then a thought came into his head. He hacked the knight's face in such a way that not even his most intimate friend could have recognised him. After that, he exchanged clothes and weapons with him, and marched through the forest with the determination of going to Nottingham. It was at this time that Little John, having been captured by the sheriff, was in the course of being bound to a tree, preparatory to their return to Nottingham.

On completing his capture the sheriff, considerably elated, praised the valour of his men, and they almost imagined that they had received the reward which had been promised them.

Going up to Little John, he taunted him with his celerity in running, and vowed that he would drag him at the heels of his horse back to Nottingham; and that, on the following day, he should be hung early in the morning.

Little John, though bound, was plucky enough to reply to the sheriff, and reminded him of the many narrow escapes he had had from the hands of Robin.

He moreover declared, that if the sheriff dared hang him, Robin would lose no time in revenging his death.

While this pleasant little conversation was going on, they were rather startled by hearing the sound of a horn. After listening, however, the sheriff declared that it was the horn of Sir Guy of Gisborne, and that he must have had a meeting with Robin Hood.

The sheriff ordered one of his men to sound a reply, which he did.

Robin, trusting to the disguise which he wore, pushed forward in the direction from whence the sound proceeded, and, to his surprise, found himself in the presence of a numerous company of his enemies, and Little John bound to a tree. In an instant he divined the state of affairs.

The sheriff welcomed Sir Guy (as he imagined) right heartily, and his men set up a loud shout. John, too, would have cheered, for he recognised his master as soon as he saw him enter the place, and his heart beat high with hope, for he knew that his escape was certain.

"Ask what you will," said the sheriff, "good Sir Guy, and it shall be thine, for by thy blood-stained coat I know thou hast slain the traitor Robin Hood."

"I have slain a man in the forest who wears the garb of Robin Hood," was the bold reply, "and all I ask as a favour is, that having slain the master, I may now slay the man."

"Thou art a madman!" the sheriff replied, "for

thou mightest have had a fee as well ; but since thou hast only asked so slight a boon, 'tis granted."

Quoth Little John, to keep up appearances, "I protest thou shalt not slay me in cold blood ; give me but fair play, and I care not how many thou sendest against me to fight."

The sheriff's only reply was a taunting laugh.

Robin drew his sword, and advanced towards Little John.

The sheriff and all his men moved up after him, as though to see the manner of his death ; but Robin drove them back, telling them it was unmannerly for so many to hear the shrift of the dying man.

Robin then called out to Little John at the top of his voice,—

"Thou knave, prepare to have a short shrift and a long journey."

Bending his head, he pretended as if he was listening to what Little John was saying, but all the while he was quietly cutting his bonds, and ere he raised his head again Little John was free, and had Sir Guy's bow and quiver of arrows in his hands. Then Robin put his horn to his mouth and blew three shrill blasts.

The sheriff and his men looked on amazed, and did not seem able to comprehend what was passing.

Robin called out to him to come quickly and shrive them both, or he was afraid he would lose his chance.

Then the sheriff saw, with horror, that Little John was free again, and armed.

The men were no less startled; but before they could attempt an assault or make off, Robin's men arrived, and surrounded them. Robin ordered the sheriff and his party to lay down their arms; and, seeing the forest rovers all around them, they submitted with the worst grace imaginable, threw down their arms, and begged for mercy,

The sheriff himself was very much dismayed at the sudden appearance of the host, and could not refrain from giving expression to his disappointment by declaring that Robin must be in league with the Evil One, or he would never have succeeded in accomplishing what he had that day.

Robin warned the sheriff, that if he persisted in following him as he had done, he would, the next time he caught him, hang him like a dog.

The sheriff vowed, that in the future he would shew amendment in his treatment of Robin. But the latter said his promise should avail only for the future, and that he must not expect to go unpunished for what he had done that day.

All the sheriff's men were bound to trees, while a council was held as to what should be done to them.

At length the punishment was decided upon. Robin's men cut the jackets of their prisoners in such a way as to leave them only half hanging on their backs. This operation provoked a good deal of laughter. The men's beards were next cut close to their chins, and their hair cropped close to their heads. Robin declared that their wives would not know them again, whereat all his men laughed.

When night set in, and Robin knew the gates of Nottingham would be closed, the sheriff, who had been cropped like his men, was bound to the back of his horse with strong cords. The horse was next led on to the high road, and well whipped, when it bounded off at a gallop in the direction of the town.

Robin and his band then left the sheriff's men bound to the trees, and departed for their home in the forest.

The horse which the sheriff rode continued his gallop until he reached the very gates of Nottingham, by which time the unfortunate man was suffering from aches in every bone.

The horse quietly ran up to one of the gates, but, finding it shut, turned away to the border of the road, to crop the grass.

The sheriff, however, was very loth to spend the night in the same position in which he had been fixed by Robin ; and when the horse was quietly cropping the grass, he raised his voice as loud as he could, and shouted, "Good people, I pray you, save me, save me!"

This cry was heard by the watchman at the gate, but he did not recognise the voice. It sounded so unearthly in the dead of a dark night, that he crossed himself, muttering a prayer or two, and took no further heed.

The horse, not finding the grass that suited his particular fancy, walked on, beside the walls of the town, and as he went, the sheriff raised his voice again and again, shouting, "Good people, save me, save me!"

As the horse passed by, the soldiers on the walls heard the cry, and trembled, as it recalled to their minds strange stories told by old women, of ghosts that haunted the night, and of spirits that the friars preached about, who wandered in mid air, restless on account of some crime that they had committed in the body.

The watchmen, as they were changed, told their fellows what had occurred; and as each succeeding sentinel heard the cry, a general alarm was created. The officers of the guard were summoned, and they, too, heard the strange cry. At length it was determined to summon the holy brethren from the nearest abbey, that they might lay the unhappy spirit that spoke in so human a voice, and so sorely troubled the soldiers.

To the nearest abbey a messenger was dispatched to acquaint the abbot. The abbey bell was rung, and all the brethren were gathered together. Then a long procession was formed; sacred relics were carried aloft by monks; at their head walked the abbot in full canonicals, preceded by a monk, carrying a huge cross. There were several torches carried by some of the brethren and the soldiers, and thus, in solemn state, they went down to the walls of the town. As they walked along, the abbot sprinkled the battlements with holy water, murmuring words of prayer; but no sound was heard of an unearthly spirit.

They had gone a considerable distance along the walls, and the abbot began to wish himself in his bed again, when all were startled by the cry that had so

alarmed the soldiers. The abbot made the procession halt, that they might listen; when, with awful distinctness, they heard the words, "Good people, save me, save me!" The words were repeated a second time, loud and clear.

The abbot looked at the cross-bearer, the cross-bearer looked at the abbot, and both drew nearer to each other. Those behind moved up closer to those in front, and those in front backed towards those who were behind. The soldiers trembled and crossed themselves.

Again, there came the voice, "I beseech you, in the name of the holy Virgin, save me, save me!"

"Be still, unquiet soul!" exclaimed the abbot, in a voice trembling with emotion.

But the unquiet soul only called out the louder, "Save me, save me!"

The abbot repeated his words several times, but there was no efficacy in his exhortation, the words of the restless sheriff were only repeated with more earnestness. Again and again came the melancholy voice, and the abbot, losing all self-control, suddenly gathered up the skirts of his robes, and, taking to his heels, made for the abbey as fast as he could run.

This conduct on his part created a panic among his followers. The cross fell to the ground, torches were thrown down, the holy water was pitched away, and the whole party, soldiers and monks, ran as fast as ever they could in the wake of their leader. Nor did they slacken speed until they all found themselves within the precincts of the abbey grounds.

The abbot declared that the spirit was one that bells only had power over, and accordingly the abbey bells were set ringing, to scare away the unholy spirit.

The unfortunate sheriff was in the meantime carried round about the walls of the town. He lay in a very uncomfortable position on the back of the horse, his mind occupied with remembrances of sundry naughty deeds.

When the morning dawned a soldier, bolder than the rest, ventured to peer over the battlements, and then he saw, to his astonishment, the cause of all their alarm. Feeling ashamed at his fright, he slipped out of the town very quietly, and released the sheriff from his uncomfortable position.

The sheriff told a mournful tale of his sufferings during the night, and the man explained how they had thought him an evil spirit, and so had not dared to come out.

The sheriff besought the soldier not to tell any one of the discovery he had made, lest the people should ridicule him.

This the soldier readily assented to, and the sheriff departed to his own house.

He afterwards sent a party of men into the forest to relieve those who were tied up, and then betook himself to bed.

Before the messengers could be dispatched the men arrived from the forest, having been released by some beggars, who, chancing to pass at an early hour, found them tied up as Robin's men had left them.

They begged hard to be released, and the poor beggars had severed their bonds for them. The beggars made no secret of what they had done, in hopes of getting a large reward.

The appearance of the sheriff's men provoked much mirth in Nottingham. For months they were marked men in Nottingham, their cut beards and cropped hair indicating, without difficulty, the men who had gone out with the sheriff on his noted expedition after Little John.

They became so thoroughly ashamed of themselves as to vow that they would never be induced, by any pretence on the part of the sheriff, or the governor of the castle, or even the king himself, to take part in any expedition into Sherwood Forest again.

The sheriff had had such a miserable night that he vowed he would never cross a horse in chase of a forest rover again, and he kept his word.

The soldier and the sheriff also kept their words with regard to the spirit that had haunted the walls; and, as it was never heard of afterwards, the abbot got the credit of having laid it. As the sheriff's men had not been witnesses of their master's treatment, but thought that he had been carried off by Robin Hood, his midnight race was kept from the ears of the common people.





CHAPTER XXVIII.

Robin and Will capture some Treasure belonging to the King—Sir William Boldheart undertakes to capture Robin—The Forces meet in the Forest—A long and terrible Fight—Death of some of Robin's Leaders.

ROBIN'S men made fine fun out of their exploit with the sheriff and his men, and waited with some eagerness to hear of the reception of the men in Nottingham.

They had a quiet time of it during the early part of the summer of 1216, having no meetings with persons of any consequence; but only an occasional interview with a beggar, whose capture yielded them but small profit and a great amount of trouble.

Towards the close of the summer, intelligence was received of the death of King John, which gave great satisfaction to all the outlaws. On the 28th of October his successor, Henry III., was crowned King of England.

The events which transpired in the kingdom kept Robin from being molested for several months.

In the summer of 1217 Robin came in contact with some of the servants of the new king.

Robin and Will were walking in the direction of Mansfield, when they caught sight of some men having six sumpter horses. They immediately hid themselves behind some trees and watched for the approach of the train.

It turned out to be a cavalcade of soldiers, accompanying the king's collectors, who had been drawing money from some of the king's tenants under some frivolous pretence, and the sumpter horses were laden with the coin so collected.

At the head of the party rode the collectors, two knights, who wore plumes in their hats. Behind them the captain of the soldiers, who numbered thirty. Besides these, there were six men who led the horses.

Robin determined to attack them. Without showing themselves, both fired at the same moment, and one of the collectors and the captain of the soldiers fell from their horses seriously wounded.

The whole of the party, on seeing two of their number wounded, and not seeing their assailants, appeared to be thrown into a state of utter consternation.

The men leading the sumpter horses sprang on the horses of the nearest soldiers, and so impeded the free action of a number of them.

Two more arrows fired into their midst brought two more men to the ground. Again two more arrows from the unseen foe, and two more men fell down.

The suddenness of the attack, the mystery which seemed to shroud it, and the number wounded, created

a panic amongst them. Each man fancied he might be the next victim, and was powerless to resist. So without more ado, the horsemen put spurs into their steeds, and galloped off as fast as their horses could carry them, leaving the wounded men and the sumpter horses behind them.

Robin and Will could scarce repress their mirth as they caught sight of the faces of the poor men who had taken up positions behind some of the soldiers, and so rode double weight.

As they rode off at last two arrows were fired, but this time over the heads of the horsemen, which seemed to impart additional zest to their desire for escape.

When they were fairly out of sight, Robin and Will stepped from their hiding. They first of all secured the sumpter horses, and then they proceeded to examine those they had knocked over. These lay stunned and bleeding upon the ground, but not dangerously wounded.

Will made bandages for their wounds, and all of them were assisted to their feet. The collector was wounded in his right arm, and the commander of the force in his right leg. On seeing Robin and Will approach them, they stared very hard, and looked all round as though they expected to see a large force behind them; but not seeing any more, they demanded in an imperious tone how it was that they had dared to attack the king's force.

Robin bade them not talk about the king there, that he was Robin Hood, and King of Sherwood Forest, and he was only about to levy toll upon them

as travellers through the forest, in accordance with an old established custom.

Will asked the commander what had become of his brave soldiers, and declared that they were the sharpest at running away that he had ever seen.

The wounded soldiers sat upon the ground looking at Robin and Will with awe, almost inclining to the belief that they were spirits of evil that had come out of the forest to torment them.

After all their wounds had been dressed, Robin directed them to mount their horses and accompany him into the forest.

The commander refused at first, and would have resisted ; but on rising to his feet, found he was not able to stand alone, and so was obliged to give in, and allowed himself to be assisted on to his horse.

Will had taken the precaution of tying the horses' heads together, so that they could not run away.

When all were mounted, the legs of each rider were tied under the horse's belly, and then the horses were tied heads to tails. Robin went first, leading the sumpter horses, and Will followed, holding the bridle of the collector's horse.

Their arrival at the glade, where all the prisoners were brought, created quite a sensation, as the band had not had the pleasure of receiving visitors for many months. A grand feast was made ready, to which most of the wounded men did ample justice. The baggage of the sumpter horses was unpacked in the presence of all the band, and on pouring out the money it was found to amount to nearly £3000. The

collector, whose name was Sir Thomas Lovelace, made strange grimaces as he saw the money passed into the hands of Robin's men, to be locked up in their strong chest.

Marian invited the wounded men to take up their abode in the forest until they were quite recovered, and this was gladly accepted by the leaders, who felt that an enforced captivity of some duration would lend colour to the account they should concoct of their treatment.

The men remained in the forest several weeks. During this time Robin paid every attention to his guests, and Marian and Ellen were constant in their care, dressing their wounds and otherwise ministering to them with all the tenderness of which a woman alone is capable.

When they were well enough to move about, Robin arranged several shooting matches, and displayed before the astonished eyes of his guests the wonderful skill of which he was master. He further varied the tedium of their confinement by having sundry hunts in the forest, into which the guests entered with as much spirit as Robin and his band.

That portion of the escort which escaped from Robin arrived safely at Nottingham, where they spread a report of an attack having been made upon them by a large force. Their stories were so mysterious that the soldiers of Nottingham conceived the idea that the evil one had let loose a number of his captives upon the forest for the special purpose of plaguing men, and driving them to destruction.

The king was very wroth when he heard of what had happened, and that his money had been taken from his men.

Inluck declared, when he heard the story, that it was only one of Robin Hood's tricks; and a strong representation was made to the king against Robin.

The king accordingly sent word to the sheriff of Nottingham, that he should offer a large reward for the capture of Robin, and assist any knight who might choose to raise a force for the purpose of effecting his capture.

The terms of this proclamation were perfectly satisfactory to the sheriff, who had very resolutely made up his mind never to meddle, on his own responsibility, with Robin or his men again.

The continued absence of those left behind in the forest confirmed the story first told by the runaway escort, that they had all been killed.

Inluck had the king's proclamation made known in all the large towns in the country; but no one was found brave enough to undertake the responsibility of leading a force into the forest.

Several months expired, and the sheriff reported to the king that he could not prevail upon any one to attempt the capture of Robin. Whereupon the king got into a rage, and vowed that they were all cowards in the country, and that he would be obliged to take the field against a contemptible forest rover.

Amongst those who were present when the king thus spoke, was one Sir William Boldheart, a knight of considerable renown. The words were scarcely out

of the royal mouth before he was kneeling at the feet of the king, beseeching him that he might be allowed to go down to Nottingham, hunt out the turbulent fellow, and bring him captive to London.

The king gave his immediate consent, and bade the knight take with him what force he liked.

Sir William selected fifty soldiers, and left London without delay.

On his arrival at Nottingham, he was received with honours by the sheriff, and a proclamation was issued for additional men to accompany him into the forest. After considerable difficulty, the knight raised a force of about two hundred, and with this he determined to scour the forest until he met with Robin Hood and his band.

Of all the knight's movements Robin was kept well informed. He summoned all the members of his band to a meeting in the forest, to determine on the course of proceedings that should be adopted; and entertaining no doubts of success, it was ultimately resolved that they should seek a meeting with the knight's force and give fair battle. The members of Robin's band were very much elated at the prospect of striking a bold blow at the king's forces.

At first they allowed the knight and his men to scour the forest for several days. During this time Robin and his band kept close in their glade. After three days' unsuccessful searching, the knight's force became much diminished.

On the fourth day Robin resolved to give Sir William battle. The king's forces were armed with cross-

bows and swords ; but they were not so skilful in the use of the cross-bow as Robin's men were with their straight bows ; and in close quarters, Robin relied upon the constant exercise to which his men were subjected to enable them to overcome their opponents. Robin's party numbered no more than one hundred, while the knight had about a hundred and fifty.

Robin divided his force into five companies, giving the command of four of them to Little John, Will, Much, and Scathelock, retaining the fifth for himself.

The five companies marched separately, so that not more than one band would be seen whenever they should chance to meet the enemy. Robin's object then was to draw the knight's force in pursuit of one company, so that the remaining four might have time to come up. Having given his men full instructions as to what they were to do, he led the first band into the forest. The other four were to follow at short intervals of time. The last band to leave the glade was that under the generalship of Little John.

Robin marched directly towards Nottingham, where he hoped to meet the king's forces, just as they entered the forest ; but not so near to the town as to allow of their sending for reinforcements.

Having come within four miles of the town, Robin ordered his men to lie down, and then blew a low blast upon his horn. This was intended as a signal to the remaining members of his force to halt at the point to which they had come, and remain until a second signal was given.

The sound of the horn, however, reached the ears

of Sir William, who was then in the forest; and he immediatly ordered his men to follow him to the quarter from whence it proceeded.

After waiting a short time where he was, Robin ordered his men to get up, and return in the same direction whence they had come. After they had proceeded a short distance he sounded his horn again, to give his friends notice that he was returning.

At the same time Sir William was marching rapidly up behind Robin, and some stragglers he had directed to loiter behind brought up the intelligence that the soldiers were in sight. Robin immediately blew three loud blasts upon his horn, which was the signal for all his men to come up at once. Then he made his own men secrete themselves behind the trees, and directed them, as soon as ever the soldiers came in sight, to treat them with a flight of arrows.

In a few minutes up came Sir William and his men; but the moment they came within reach a shower of arrows was sent amongst them. This brought them to a stand-still, and Sir William's voice was heard directing them to get behind the trees. The ground was dotted with several dead and dying men.

In a few moments a number of them were ordered to advance; but the moment they shewed themselves the well-aimed arrows of the rovers made execution in their ranks.

At this juncture Robin's second band arrived, and went under cover of the trees. When those under

Robin fired one shower of arrows they retired behind the trees, in the rear of the new comers. The second party then fired when they got an opportunity, and retired in their turn, and so an incessant hail of arrows was kept up, so long as any of the enemy were visible.

In a very short time other companies belonging to Robin arrived ; and then they were directed to take up final positions behind the trees, and stand their ground.

The knight imitating the example set him by Robin, made his men hide themselves as much as possible behind the trees ; but directed them to advance towards their opponents. The moment an unfortunate man on either side shewed a limb three or four arrows were shot at him.

After this sort of warfare had been carried on for some time, Robin's quick eye noted a change in the disposition of the enemy. They were preparing for a grand attack, with the view to drive Robin's men from under cover. They laid down their cross-bows and armed themselves with their swords.

Robin blew a single blast upon his horn, which was the signal for his men to throw aside their bows and draw their swords. This was done immediately, and then they quietly awaited the onslaught of their foe.

They had not to wait long. With a loud shout the soldiers burst from under cover, ran swiftly across the intervening space, and were hand to hand with Robin's men.

Robin singled out the knight, and they crossed swords with much spirit. The worthy knight was no

match for the forest-trained arm of Robin, so that, after fighting for a short time, Robin, with a dexterous blow, almost severed his opponent's head from his shoulders.

With regard to the men, the odds against Robin were at first very great; but the repeated showers of arrows with which the knight's soldiers had been assailed had considerably thinned their numbers, and when they forsook the cover for the close conflict they were pretty nearly equal.

Robin had the fullest confidence in his men. He directed them to stand their ground, and each select his man. In the confusion, however, two or three soldiers had attacked a rover, and before the odds were balanced several of Robin's best men were slain. Amongst these were Much and Scathelock. Little John suddenly found himself face to face with four soldiers, all of whom struck wildly at him. He managed to give to two of them thrusts that ended their career, but was knocked down himself by the other two. Before they could give him the finishing stroke, he managed to knock both of his assailants over with his legs, and, before either of them could recover, he transfixed one with his sword, and the other ran away.

Will also found himself placed at considerable odds, as three men sprang at him. He placed his back against a tree, slew one, and kept the others for some time well employed in warding off his blows. Before he could get assistance, however, he received a desperate wound in his breast. Seeing the condition he

was in, some of his men ran up, and both of his opponents were quickly despatched. He was so desperately wounded, however, that he could take no further part in the fray, and was laid on the grass, with his back resting against a tree.

Scathelock was stabbed in the neck from behind, while fighting manfully; and Much tripped over a fallen foe, and was slain before he could recover himself.

On being freed from his opponent, Robin moved amongst the combatants, cheering his men. Wherever he saw one of his men overmatched he plucked him aside and took his place, fighting until he had either killed or wounded his foe.

There came at length a general cry from the knight's men for quarter, and Robin sounded his horn as the signal for leaving off the fight.

He directed the knight's men to give up their arms, and submit to be bound, promising that he would spare their lives.

On walking over the field, Robin found that beside those mentioned there lay dead David of Doncaster, Gilbert with the Whitehand, and ten others, while about twenty more were wounded. Of the knight's force, he found that twenty had been slain, and forty had received severe wounds. Eighty more submitted as prisoners, and the remainder had either been slain by arrows or had run away.

A litter was made, and Will was carried off to the Greenwood Glade, to have his wounds dressed. Two of the prisoners and four of Robin's men were directed to remain with the wounded, and the other prisoners

and the rovers returned with Robin to the visitors' glade.

From here Robin despatched bread, meat, wine, and water to those who lay in the forest, and directed bandages to be prepared for the wounded men.

Friar Tuck volunteered to go to the wounded, and was accompanied by Ellen, Alan, and one or two more, who had been left behind.

Will, on reaching the Greenwood Glade, was immediately attended to by Marian. It was evident to her at first sight that his hours were numbered. He was suffering from a raging thirst, and talked incoherently about the fight. All Marian's skill was unavailing to staunch the flow of blood, and, after the lapse of an hour, she sent for Robin, telling the messenger to say that she was afraid Will was dying. When Robin came, he found Will lying on a bed of rushes, near the house. It was a glorious summer evening. Light clouds were skimming across the heavens, away from the setting sun, as though, weary of the brightness, they longed for shadow and rest. The tops of the trees were tipped with the golden rays of the sun, and the leaves trembled with a gentle murmuring sound, as though they were unwilling to part with the bright warmth and light of day. Will lay with his eyes fixedly gazing into the heavens. He did not speak as Robin bent over him, and peered into his face. He was sinking fast. Then Will spoke, as though he was taking part in scenes that had transpired long years before. He spoke of Ivy Harper, and murmured,

"Poor Marian!" Then he was silent, and Marian's tears fell on the dying man's face. Again his lips moved, and his two friends just caught the words, feebly whispered, "Father, father, wait a bit, I am coming." Then death came, and Will's spirit fled.

Robin and Marian were both much affected at the loss of their old companion. There was no time to be spent, however, in mourning, and after the first burst of grief was over, he led Marian away with him, thinking that the excitement of tending the wounded would distract her attention from Will's death.

"Are you strong enough," said Robin, "to look upon the faces of many wounded men that need your help. The dead will not frighten you, I know, though they lie thick in the forest."

"I am strong enough to do my duty," Marian replied, "and I am not afraid of the dead; I have looked upon the faces of those that were dear to me. You remember once, in the dead of night, when we looked upon the face of one very dear to me. I was not afraid then, and I am even stronger now."

Robin forthwith accompanied Marian to the place where the fight had taken place. There he found the king's exchequer collector and the commander of the late expedition against him, with the others whom they had kept prisoners in the forest. They were all busying themselves in attending to the wounded. The whole night was spent in binding up wounds and attending to the wants of the poor men. In the morning many of them were able to walk to

the visitors' glade, while others were carried thither on litters constructed for the purpose.

Then came the task of burying the dead. Several graves were dug in the forest. In one huge grave were laid the bodies of the knight's men, and in another Robin's. The knight himself was buried, with all honour, in a separate grave; Much, Scathe-lock, Will, David, and Gilbert also had separate graves dug for them.

The result of this battle made a great impression upon Robin. The wounded men were kindly nursed, until perfectly recovered, and then were allowed to depart, together with the exchequer collector and his party, who had been in the forest for a considerable time.

Before these men left the forest, however, Robin called his band together, and told them that he should sue to the king for pardon, and that if the king granted it, then he should dismiss them all to their homes.

All the band, affected by the loss of their leaders, assented to the proposition.

Robin then begged Lovelace, the collector and the commander, to tell the king that they prayed for his royal clemency, and were willing, if he would pardon them, and permit them to return to their homes, to deliver up half the money that they had obtained from the collector.

The treatment that the chief prisoners had received, was of such a character as to create a favourable impression upon them, and they declared that Robin's message should be faithfully delivered.



CHAPTER XXIX.

Robin and his Band receive the King's Pardon—Little John and Friar Tuck go to the Castle of Sir Richard of the Lea—The Friar's Death—Ellen and Alan Return to the Dale—Robin and Marian go up to London—Their Return to Sherwood—Marian's Death.

UNTIL the return of a messenger from London, Robin and his friends remained in the forest ; but their heavy loss in the conflict with Sir William Boldheart weighed heavily upon their spirits, and their days were not so merry as they had been.

After the lapse of several weeks, Sir Thomas Lovelace returned from London. He was directed by the king to take the sheriff of Nottingham with him into the forest as an escort. The sheriff was very unwilling to go there again ; but consented readily when he found that it was to convey to Robin the news of the king's favour.

The sheriff collected together far more men than had ever been willing to go with him on a warlike expedition, and started off with Sir Thomas Lovelace to fetch Robin.

The collection of so large a force of men in the

town attracted considerable attention, and the news soon spread that Robin's pardon had arrived.

This fact was conveyed to Robin by one of his friends; but with his usual caution Robin refused to trust himself to the tender mercies of the sheriff.

The first expedition, therefore, returned from the forest without having come in contact with the noted outlaw.

On the following morning, when about to set out again, Robin contrived to send a message to Sir Thomas Lovelace that he would not meet him unless he came accompanied with the sheriff only.

The sheriff, however, refused flatly to go with Sir Thomas, and the knight at length determined to go alone. He was not at all afraid of meeting with Robin, having learned his real worth while a captive in the forest. The brave knight set forth alone, and when he had penetrated several miles into the heart of the forest, he blew a loud blast upon his horn. The sound had scarcely died away before Robin stood by his side.

Sir Thomas begged Robin's forgiveness for having given him the slightest ground for alarm, and then exhibited the king's pardon, sealed with the great seal of the kingdom.

Robin then led him to Friar Tuck and the rest of the band, and the document was read aloud in the hearing of all. Then there followed much shouting and clapping of hands.

There was one stipulation in the document which Robin was unwilling to accede to at first. This was,

that he and Marian should go up to London. He was very doubtful about trusting himself to a king, knowing that they sometimes broke their promises like common men.

Sir Thomas Lovelace insisted that this was a part of the contract, and to assure Robin of the king's favour, he handed him a ring which the king had sent.

This removed all suspicion from Robin's mind.

That day they had a last feast in the forest, that had during so many years rung with their merry laughter.

The following morning they all set out for Nottingham. The sheriff was summoned, and Sir Thomas Lovelace made him take an oath before all the people in the market-place, that he would suffer no ill to come to any of Robin's men who might choose to remain in Nottingham, on account of any part they had taken with Robin Hood.

After a few days had passed, Robin and Marian started off with Sir Thomas Lovelace on their way to London.

When the time came to part, Little John and Friar Tuck were very much puzzled what to do with themselves. The friar declared, if he entered a religious house again, he would have to do penance for the remainder of his life. He had thriven so well upon his forest fare, that doing penance would be a very serious matter to him.

Little John declared, that his forest life had unfitted him for any other sort.

In this extremity, they bethought themselves of the invitation long before given them by Sir Richard of the Lea, and they determined to proceed thither.

Sir Richard received them gladly, saying he wanted an honest man and a true priest ; and he was sure he should find in them the qualifications he sought.

Little John had an important office assigned him in the defence of the castle ; and Friar Tuck was told to do just what he liked. So he turned his attention to the study of herbs. In the morning and evening he might have been seen wandering beside the rippling streams, gathering such herbs as he believed contained medicinal properties ; or strolling amongst the grand old forest trees, gathering plants that were commonly believed to possess healing qualities. Sometimes, it must be confessed, he would be found lurking in the kitchen while the cooking was going on, and giving very impressive directions about the roasting of joints. Sometimes he assisted in the celebration of mass ; but this did not take place very often.

One day the friar went out to gather some herbs of which he was in want, and when night came he did not return. He was missed by Little John after his duties were over for the day. It was the first time he had been absent at so late an hour. No alarm was, however, excited ; and Little John jocularly declared that he must have met with some village maiden, and was detained hearing her confession.

In the afternoon of the following day, as he had not returned, a party was sent out to search for him. They were proceeding along the edge of a stream that

ran through the forest, not far from the knight's castle, when they found him lying on his face, his feet just washed by the running water. His right hand was outstretched, as though he had fallen while in the act of plucking an herb. His eyes were distended, and his mouth wide open. He was quite dead. It was supposed that he had been attacked by a fit, and had fallen dead upon the ground. His body was removed to the castle. A grave was dug in the forest under a giant oak, and at night he was laid therein, to sleep the last long sleep, and mingle his dust with the soil of that same forest he had so loved in life.

The day that Robin's pardon was brought by Sir Thomas Lovelace, a messenger arrived in the forest from the Dale, with a message from Ellen's parents. Old Hardfist was lying in a very infirm state at his house, and he was very anxious for Ellen and Alan to return and live with him. They both had the old man's pardon, the messenger said, and would be amply provided for at his death.

Robin advised them to return. They consented, and bade their old forest friends a sorrowful farewell.

During the years that had passed since Ellen's marriage, Hardfist and his dame had gradually become reconciled to their disappointment.

The Baron de Younglove had solaced himself soon after Ellen's escape, by taking a young village maiden for his wife. But soon afterwards, strange tales of her sufferings were circulated in the village, and one day her body was found lying in the moat. The people of the Dale, believing that she had been mur-

dered, rose up in arms against the old baron, and gave him such a thrashing as brought on his death. The castle then passed into the hands of another baron, who had no other right to it than that which his sword afforded. But the new comer soon made friends of the inhabitants of the Dale by his kindness and courtesy.

Ellen took her place in Hardfist's household as general manager, and both her parents were tended with the utmost affection. In the years that had elapsed Ellen had become a woman in thought, in care, and in love. After a few years had gone by—the very happiest of his experience—old Hardfist died, and was buried. A few months afterwards his dame was carried to the same grave. Ellen and Alan remained in the Dale, enjoying many years of happiness together, and died in a ripe old age.

On their progress to London, Sir Thomas Lovelace made no secret that he had with him Robin Hood and Marian. The consequence was, that in every town and city through which they passed, they were received with all the honour that was usually accorded to the king. Robin learned, very much to his surprise, the esteem in which he was held throughout the country, for his defence of the oppressed Saxons, and kindness to the poor and needy.

On arriving in London, there was just as enthusiastic a reception accorded him as he had enjoyed in the country, and the king received him at court with marks of distinguished favour.

The king conferred upon him the post of com-

mander of his private company of archers; and one part of Robin's duty consisted in attending upon the king, with his men, whenever they went out hunting.

His new occupation gave him extreme pleasure at first; but, after the lapse of several months, he grew tired of the court etiquette, and longed to be back again amongst the trees, and birds, and fallow-deer of Sherwood.

Marian also grew weary of the restraints of court life and her confinement in the city, and sickness seized her.

Robin went to the king, and asked his permission to return to Sherwood.

The king asked him what he still lacked, and Robin replied, "Nothing but the free air of the forest." When the king looked upon Marian's countenance, and saw how changed she was, he gave consent, and they left London to return to their native woods again.

Before they left, Robin sought an interview with the king, and promised he would never draw a bow against one of the king's subjects so long as he lived.

The king laughingly asked Robin whether the promise ought not also to extend to his fallow-deer.

But Robin said nothing in reply.

They left London with several horses laden with presents, from the nobility about the court.

The return journey was a long and tedious one. On the way, Marian's illness increased so much that before her arrival at Nottingham she was utterly

prostrated, and Robin had a litter constructed for her to ride in. At length they reached Nottingham, and, after resting one night, they departed for the castle of Sir Richard of the Lea.

Here they were welcomed very heartily ; but when Sir Richard and his lady looked upon the face of Marian their hearts sank within them.

Marian was nursed with the utmost care and tenderness by the knight's lady, but her strength gradually declined, and Robin felt that he would soon lose the devoted partner of an eventful life. He was ceaseless in his attentions to her, and watched beside her couch by night as well as day.

For several days after their arrival at the castle, Marian talked with Robin of events that had transpired in the years that had fled. She spoke of their first meeting in the forest, of the wild flowers, the singing birds, the fallow-deer, and the running streams of the forest. Then her memory seemed to go further back, and her very earliest remembrances came up—dim recollections that seemed to have a bare shadowy outline, and nothing more.

One evening they had been talking several hours. It was summer time, and Marian lay before an open casement, through which she looked out upon the broad expanse of forest, and could hear the birds singing to their mates. The deep blue of the sky was relieved by soft clouds of the purest white. Marian lay perfectly still, gazing upon the lovely scene before her. Robin fancied he saw a change come over her face. She was lying on one of the softest beds that

the castle possessed. Her head was propped upon pillows, and inclined to Robin's arm, which was stretched upon them. Her pale thin features were overspread with a pallor that told of the approach of a crisis, and Robin's heart beat with tenfold haste.

"Robin, Robin!" Marian exclaimed suddenly, "lead me across the square; I must see him once more." As she spoke she placed her feverish hand upon Robin's neck. "Ah! there," she continued, "I knew they had killed him. How still he lies, Robin. Take care, or you will wake him. This horn is for you; wake the echoes. Robin, bind those flowers in your hair; I gathered them for you." Then regaining partial consciousness, "It is hard, but you are left, Robin, and you will love me. Poor Will dead too, and killed, they say."

Her voice and manner then changed. She raised her head, and saw that Robin's face was wet with tears. She drew his head down to her face, kissed the tears away from his cheeks, and, in a calm voice, said, "Robin, don't weep about me, but be glad, for I am happy, very happy; and in that place where I am going I shall see those I have loved, and you will follow when the right day comes. When we meet there"—unconsciousness returned, and she spoke as though she fancied she was binding up Will's wounds again; and she chided Friar Tuck for not helping her.

Again she seemed to slumber, but in a moment began to breathe heavily.

While she lay thus, Sir Richard's lady entered.

On looking at Marian she started, and clasped her hands, as though appalled by her thoughts. There she stood, with hands still clasped, and looked on, without saying a word.

In a few minutes Marian opened her eyes again, and smiled when she saw the lady present. She turned to Robin, gently drew his hand from the pillow, took it within both of hers, and murmured words that he could not understand. Her look changed while she essayed to speak, her eyes were fixed upon his. He bent his head, and heard her whisper, "Robin, Robin!" then she was silent.

This was death.

But Robin would not believe that she was dead, and seemed oblivious of everything. He did not speak or move, and when spoken to made no reply. Then Sir Richard came to lead him away, and he went out from the chamber, and bowed his head in the extremity of his grief. He lay as in a stupor for nearly an hour, when a wild burst of anguish shook his frame.

The preparations for the burial were soon completed. Robin chose a grave beneath an old oak that grew on the slope of a hill, which was thickly carpeted with flowers. There Marian was buried. Close by, at the foot of the slope, ran a stream, whose murmuring voice mourned unceasingly, in the sunlight and in the darkness, for her who never would return.





CHAPTER XXX.

Death of Robin Hood and Little John.

THOSE were weary months that followed upon the death of Marian. Day by day Robin repaired to Marian's last resting place. He carved a rude cross, which he fixed amongst some stones, at the head of her grave. By that cross he would spend hours of each day, living over again the past. After a time, when the bitterness of his sorrow had somewhat abated, though the strength of his love was in no wise lessened, Little John became his constant companion, accompanying him into the forest every day. Now and then they shot a deer, just to supply the wants of his castle friends.

Months passed, and those excursions into the forest took them longer distances, and sometimes they would sleep in the forest, and hunt the next day. These exercises were, however, too much for Robin's strength now.

One day, towards the close of the summer of 1225,

he complained to Little John of feeling ill. They were then in the neighbourhood of Kirklees Abbey.

"Master," said Little John, "we are near to the abbey, and methinks the skilful hand of the abbess will soon restore thee."

Robin was too ill to make objection; so to the abbey they wended their way. On arriving at the abbey, the good abbess was summoned.

Quoth Robin to her, "Once thou gavest me shelter from armed men, and my life was saved. Now I have come to crave rest for a brief time, and methinks it will be the last boon I shall ask from mortal, for I go a journey longer and stranger than I have ever gone before."

"Thou art right welcome to the abbey," said the abbess; "as for the long journey of which thou speakest, when God wills man cannot hold back."

A little room over the gateway to the abbey was allotted to Robin, and thither he was conveyed by Little John.

As soon as he had rested a short time, Marian Pinkerly bled him in the arm. That night Robin grew rapidly worse, and in the morning the abbess declared he was attacked with fever.

All the skill she possessed was exerted to restore him to health. Little John never left his master's couch for an hour, but carried out all the directions given him by the abbess, as to the application of the remedies which she prescribed.

Several days passed, the crisis came, and the good abbess watched beside him, as anxious as Little John

to note the first change that might betoken good or evil.

In the little church hard by, in which he had aforetime taken sanctuary, several nuns knelt at the altar offering up prayers on his behalf.

At length, the abbess fancied she noticed a change in her patient. He was less restless than he had been, his breathing was more regular, and his sleep peaceful. Kneeling beside his couch, she clasped her hands in prayer, exclaiming, "Thank God, the worst is past, and his life will be spared. To the Father be all the glory."

Little John bent his head as the words of prayer were uttered, and spoke a hearty "Amen."

On raising his head, he brushed away, as though ashamed of himself, some tears that would trickle down his cheeks, and then fixed his gaze again upon the sorrow-furrowed face of his master.

The abbess rose from her knees, and proceeded to the church, where she ordered the nuns to sing a hymn of praise for Robin's recovery.

He did recover from that moment. His strength returned rapidly, and in a few days—but too soon for his strength—he got up, and went out with Little John for a ramble in the forest. This gave him a fresh cold, and his illness returned.

Days and nights of anxious watching were again spent by Little John, while the abbess relaxed nothing of her kind attention to promote his restoration to health. All was without avail. He rapidly sank. He lay unconscious for several days, during

which time all that he uttered was the name of Marian. Then reason returned, and certain signs of death were noticed.

It was evening. Little John leaned upon the casement, which was open. The rays of the setting sun played in golden gleams about the face of the dying man.

"Little John," he exclaimed, "I feel new strength within me; bring me my bow, and let me shoot once more!"

"Master, at what wouldst thou shoot?" quoth Little John.

"My grave," said Robin, "for before morning I shall die!"

Little John brought Robin his bow, and propped him up, so that he might take aim through the casement. Fitting an arrow to the string, Robin shot an arrow, which fell to the ground beneath some old yews.

"Master, it is a fair shoot," said Little John.

"Where the arrow is, there let me be buried to-morrow," said Robin.

During that night Little John watched with a heavy heart beside his master's couch. A small lamp burned feebly in the room. The chamber was pervaded by shadows. Midnight had passed; the first faint streaks of light were stretching themselves over the heavens.

Little John caught the sound of singing. It came from the church, where the nuns were chanting their customary hymns. Robin caught the sound. He

had been sleeping, Little John thought, but it was a kind of stupor. The singing roused Robin. After appearing to listen for a moment or two, he raised his right hand, and waved it in the air. It fell heavily upon his breast. He was dead.

Little John told the abbess immediately, and the song of praise was changed to a lament for the dead.

Robin was buried in the spot where the arrow rested, beneath the old yews that for centuries had withstood the storms of heaven, and whose gnarled and knotted trunks were not inapt illustrations of the life of him who was laid beneath their shade.

Little John returned to the castle of Sir Richard. After a few months his restlessness returned upon him, and he went forth to wander for a time about the forest, and the villages bordering thereon. Then he found rest,

“And Little John, the master’s favourite man,
Stiff in his giant bones at Hathersedge,
Sleeps on till doom, amongst the Derby hills.”*

* The Country Sketch Book, by January Searle.



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